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SCIENCE FICTION

OCTOBER 1959

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THE ACCIDENT THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN
by
WILLY LEY

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A DEATH IN THE HOUSE
by
CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

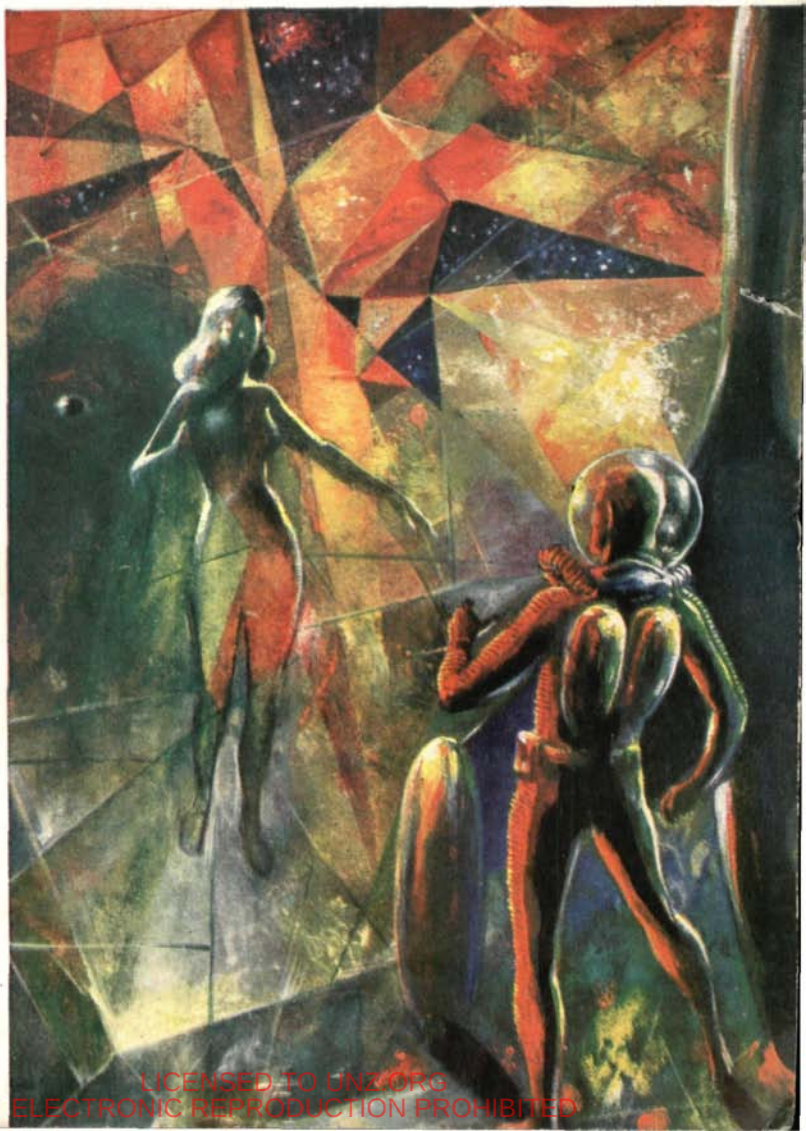
•

SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME
by
CHRISTOPHER GRIMM

•

SILENCE
by
JOHN BRUNNER

And Other Stories



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CONTENTS

NOVELLA

SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME ..... *by Christopher Grimm* 10

NOVELETS

A DEATH IN THE HOUSE ..... *by Clifford D. Simak* 84
SILENCE ..... *by John Brunner* 118
WAY UP YONDER ..... *by Charles Satterfield* 162

SHORT STORIES

LAST OF THE MORTICIANS ..... *by E. C. Tubb* 64
KING OF THE PLANET ..... *by Wilson Tucker* 104
TRUE SELF ..... *by Elisabeth Mann Borgese* 151

SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION ..... *by Willy Ley* 73
The Accident that Didn't Happen

FEATURES

EDITOR'S PAGE ..... *by H. L. Gold* 6
FORECAST 117
GALAXY'S FIVE STAR SHELF ..... *by Floyd C. Gale* 146

Cover by WOOD illustrating "*Someone to Watch over Me*"

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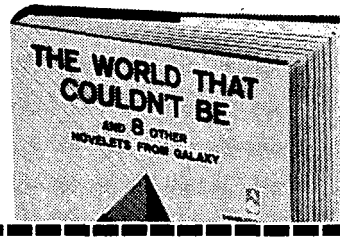

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OTHER PEOPLE'S MAIL

WRITES Pinky Finger, Mussent Point, Ind., speaking for many readers who offered the same suggestion: "I like your editorials and I like letter columns. Why not combine the two, whenever you have enough good letters on hand, so the people who like your editorials but dislike letter columns won't obect? By interpolating your comments in parentheses and italics" *(Like this?)* "you still could have a letter column, only in editorial form. But what's eating readers who don't like letter columns?" *(Research has given us the answer, but it just isn't true that reading letter columns is like going through someone else's pockets. Mail published here was meant to be read. Mail not meant to be read is simply not published, and "Please do not print this" distinguishes one from the other.)*

Vic Ryan, Springfield, Ill., says: "Advertising keeps most magazines and newspapers alive. Can you do it on circulation alone?" *(Yes. But we like advertising and our audience, generally a well-heeled bunch, interested in all sorts of products and services, is for it. Advertisers will kindly take note. The income comes in handy, of course, for improvements.)*

Frank Schwarz, Levittown, N. Y.: "I have noticed with awe and wonder that the June issue reached me on March 30." *(We explained in the last issue that dealers send back magazines dated the current month. To avoid premature returns, we have to date issues the month before they're due to come off sale. It's a trade practice that we like no better than you do, but we can't change it.)* "You might do well to date the issues say 200 or 300 years in advance and drop the prefix 'Science,' thus coming up with a practically factual magazine, which due to the terrific efficiency of its staff happens to come out a bit early. How about it?" *(If dating issues 200 or 300 years ahead became the trade practice, there would be no how-about-it. An amnesiac or time traveler, right now, today, stuck in a small town with no newspaper, would have some job finding out the date from our*

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current magazines. But not enough of our readers are in that predicament — as far as we know — to induce us to buck newsstand custom.)

John McGowan, no address: "I am enjoying your experimenting with your new format" *(So are we)* "and hope that you never settle down to a regular format" *(Not a chance)* "and just keep experimenting with various layouts." *(Like this?)*

John Buckelew, Rogers, Ark.: "With your bimonthly schedule I think you have hit a new high in quality and I hope you can mantain it." *(We can — on a bimonthly schedule. There is some argument from individual exceptions to the statistical fact that magazine readership turns over every five years or so — exceptions that we acknowledge and are thankful for. But can it be disputed that there is also an author and artist turnover — with, of course, the usual percentage of exceptions and occasional returnees? We miss the ones who are gone for good and wish the others would contribute more often, but the real solution is the same as it's always been in every field: new talent must be brought in. And in it's coming — enough for a high-quality issue every other month. What would we do if the volume increased? If you owned a magazine what would you do? Right. So would we.)*

Tascha Lorenz, Beverly Farms, Mass.: "Are you the Herbert Gold that has occasional stories in Playboy Magazine? If so, congratulations—they're great!" *(Aren't they? But I'm Horace, no relation, and I don't know the man, only his work, which I strenuously admire.)*

Fritz Leiber, Chicago, Ill.: "Students! Teachers! Start a science fiction club in your school. Have interesting meetings and meet people who read science fiction. For information on how to start a club, write to Science Through Science Fiction, Box No. 9148, Chicago 90, Ill." *(The purpose behind this needs an entire editorial. Our surveys have shown that nearly every theoretician and researcher was, as the call above says, led into science through science fiction. These same surveys show that science fiction is unknown, or all but, to people in the practical end of science. Contrary experience, however considerable it may seem, is statistically unuseful; job opportunities and military service classification far outweigh science fiction in attracting entrants. But practical science waits on basic research — every practical advance was once just an idea or a speculative guess. Russia, knowing how the extrapolative technique of science fiction leads to extrapolative work in the lab, is urging writers into science fiction, under orders to "Think, damn you, think!" to win young recruits to*

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basic research. We can't and needn't imitate their bullwhip methods; our science fiction outclasses theirs in every conceivable way. Getting it to responsive young minds is the proplem. When science fiction's role in basic research is officially understood here all youngsters will be systematically exposed to it, and then there will be an upsurge in basic research to dwindle even these past peak decades. Until then, the job must be done by all who see the necessity, and Science Through Science Fiction in the schools is a Class-A answer.)

Vincent E. Treacy, Dedham, Mass.: "Will you please put Science Fiction back on your cover and title page? In this field, yours has been the most influential magazine — bar none — in the Fifties. Now you seem to want to cut your association with science fiction. Please don't!" *(We never intended to. As explained previously, we suspect that potential readers may be attracted to the magazine but put off by the term Science Fiction. That's what we're testing right now. Term on or term off, though, this is and will remain a science fiction magazine.)*

Phyllis Ballin, New York: "As one editor, though a small one, to another, may I congratulate you and your staff . . . The editorials, in which you go to great lengths to make the reader feel as if" *(As if?)* "he were an actively consulted member of the magazine, made a fine impression. Reading good science fiction has been one of my pleasures for a long while. I thank you for your part in it. I've enclosed a recent copy of the Ladle" *(official publication N.Y. State Assn. of Plumbing Contractors).* "Space-fact rather than science fiction, I thought you might enjoy the lead article." *(I did. Lead paragraph: "The Pan American Boeing 707 flashed across the skies at 575 miles per hour, making airplane headlines, and incidentally, plumbing history. Flying at an altitude of over 7 miles high, taking only six and a half hours to get from New York to London, the mammoth craft bears in its belly the first flush toilet ever to get off the ground." Ingeniously done and a great passenger comforter, but space-fact? Not at 7 miles. My money is on the plumbers, though, to unseat the problems of weightlessness when called in for estimates.)*

E. D. Schafer, Dickinson, Tex.: "In 1886 my family moved near a fine, well-selected library — quite a rarity in a small Texas cow town — containing a full set of Jules Verne. That started me off and I've read all the s-f I could get since then — Wells, Frank Reade, Jr., etc., even one writer, name forgotten, who dealt with a trip to the

(Continued on page 193)

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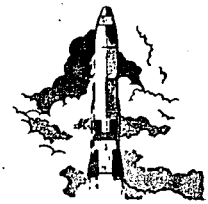
WHERE ARE WE GOING IN SPACE?

You'll find the answers in SPACE AGE — America's only magazine that "bridges the gap" between the technical journals and your local newspaper reports.



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someone to watch

In the awfulness of hyperspace, everything was the nightmare opposite of itself . . . and here was where Len Mattern found his goal!

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

I

LEN Mattern paused before the door of the Golden Apple Bar. The elation that had carried him up to this point suddenly wasn't there any more. Lyddy couldn't have changed too much, he'd kept telling himself. After all, it hadn't been so very long since he'd seen her. Now he found himself counting the years . . . and they added up to a long time.

But it was too late to go back now. A familiar thought. The com-

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over me By CHRISTOPHER GRIMM

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mitment was moral only, and to himself, no one else — the same way it had been that other time, the time that had changed the direction of his whole life, and, possibly, of all other lives in his universe as well. There was only one human being with whom he kept faith — himself. Therefore, the commitment was a binding one.

He pushed open the door and went in.

He saw Lyddy at the end of the bar, surrounded by a group of men. Lyddy had always been surrounded by a group of men, he remembered, unless she was up in her room entertaining just one. She half-turned and he saw her face. The sun-pink lips were parted, her eyes still comparable to the heavens of Earth. She stood erect and lithe and slender.

She had not changed at all!

THE tension that had built up inside him snapped with the weight of sudden relief. He lurched against a small hokur-motal table. It rocked crazily. The zhapik who owned the Golden Apple came out from behind the carved screen where he'd been sitting segregated from the customers. Many of the zhapiq, who had been native to Erytheia before the Federation took over, owned businesses catering to humans. It might be degrading, but it paid well.

"Maybe you've had enough to drink, Captain?" he suggested. "Maybe you'd like to come back another time?"

"I haven't had anything at all to drink," Mattern said curtly. "What's more, I haven't come for a drink."

He strode across the room, firmly now, and brushed aside the men who clustered around Lyddy. "I've come for you," he told her.

She didn't say anything, just looked him up and down. The beautiful blue eyes skillfully appraised his worth as a man and as a customer. Then she smiled and patted the gilded hair that streamed past her bare shoulders to her narrow waist.

"You're not a Far Planets man," she said. "How come you know about me?"

Funny he should feel disappointed. Sure, he'd been thinking of her all those years, but he'd never expected her to have been thinking of him. Yet he found himself blurting out, "Don't you remember me, Lyddy?" Then he cursed himself; first because he didn't want her to remember him as he had been; second, because he knew every man who'd ever slept with her — or a woman like her — would ask the same question. And, of course, she'd have the standard answer, something like "Why, of course I remember you, honey. I'm just not good at names."

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But she just looked at him levelly. "No, dear, I'm afraid I don't remember you," she said. Then a tiny frown gathered on her smooth forehead. "Seems to me I would've, though. When did I meet you?"

"Oh, years ago! I was just a kid!"

She flushed, and he realized he'd been a little tactless. If he was no kid any more, neither would she be. Still, she looked as young as she ever had, and he, he knew, looked younger.

He didn't want her to probe further, so he hastily made an appointment with her for an evening later that week. As he left, he could hear her saying, in a bewildered voice, "I could've sworn there was somebody with him when he came in."

And he quickened his steps.

SHE had the same room — a warm luxurious chamber, high up in the Golden Apple Hotel. Lyddy herself was the same, too, just as he remembered her.

Afterward, as they lay together in the blackness, she asked, "Can you in the dark, Captain?"

He was surprised, and then, thinking about it, not so surprised. "Of course not, no more than you can! Whatever made you ask that?"

"I—feel like somebody's looking at me."

He rolled over on his side, so his body was as far away from hers as possible. He didn't want her to feel the sudden rise of tension in him. *Something's got to be done about this,* he thought. *I can't put up with it now.*

"Why don't you say anything, honey?" her anxious voice came out of the darkness.

"Will you marry me, Lyddy?" he said.

He could hear the intake of her breath. "Ask me again in the morning," she told him wearily. He knew what she must be thinking: Men who hadn't had a woman for a long time sometimes did strange things. In the morning, she would wake up and he would be gone.

Only, when morning came, he was still there. Two weeks later, they were married.

II

LYDDY was curious about her husband-to-be and kept trying to find out all about him. Fortunately, in the code of the Far Planets, a man's past was his own business, so he was able to be evasive without actually lying to her. Not that he had any scruples, about lying; it was simply easier to tell as few stories as possible, rather than worry about keeping them straight.

But it was all right to ask about a man's present. "Do you have

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anybody, Len? Relations, anything like that?"

He frowned a little, remembering the boy on Fairhurst. "No," he said, "I have no relatives. I have nobody."

Her face fell. "It would've been kind of nice to have a ready-made family."

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "There are times when it's better to have no family."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. They might not approve of me."

"We'll be everything to each other," he assured her.

There was a ghost of a sound then — a laugh or a sigh. He hoped she didn't hear it.

The zhapik insisted on giving Lyddy's wedding, even though he himself could, of course, be present only behind the screen. Most people said the old E-T bastard knew a good piece of publicity when he saw it, but Mattern thought it might be out of genuine sentiment. He was closer to aliens than most men in this sector, any sector. Although he had originally hailed from the Far Planets, he had traveled widely and lost his prejudices. His best friend wasn't human.

Every human in Erytheia City was invited to the wedding. Mattern's four crewmen came. Three were middle-aged and had sailed with Mattern for years, but his most recent acquisition was a young man, almost a boy. Something Raines, his name was. He kept staring at Lyddy as if he had never seen a beautiful woman before, though, coming from Earth, he must have seen many. Mattern was gratified at this tribute to his choice.

"Only four crewmen!" Lyddy said, looking disappointed. "You must have a small ship."

Mattern smiled. "Not too small." He could see she didn't believe him.

Lyddy didn't seem to be enjoying her wedding. She kept glancing over her shoulder all through the ceremony and during the reception. Finally Mattern had to ask her what was wrong, although he would rather not have known.

"Y'know, hon," she whispered, "I keep having the funniest feeling there's somebody *extra* here, somebody who doesn't belong. I haven't quite seen him; he always seems to slip by so fast, but I don't even think he's a man."

"Don't be silly, Lyddy," he said, almost sharply. "You know no extraterrestrial would dare to crash a human party!"

"I guess not." But she still kept looking over her shoulder.

THE zhapik invited them to remain at the Golden Apple Hotel as his guests for as long as they liked. They stayed two months. Then Mattern told his wife it was time they started plan-

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ning their future, decided where they were going to live. "You'll want a home of your own," he said. "Otherwise you'll get bored."

"I'm never bored," said Lyddy. "But where will we go? I mean what system?"

"Well, Erytheia is a pleasure planet, so I thought we might as well stay here. There are some attractive residential neighborhoods on this continent — or, if you'd prefer, the other one."

Her face fell. "You mean we're going to stay *here?*"

He didn't know why he was so anxious to remain on Erytheia. Mainly it was because for no good reason he found himself disliking the idea of making the Jump with her. "If you'd rather, I could build you a city of your own, Lyddy," he tempted her.

It was obvious that even if she had taken this seriously, it still wouldn't be what she wanted. "I'd like to go away from here," she told him. "Far away."

"Just because you want a change — is that it?"

She hesitated. "That's partly it. But there's more. Somehow, ever since we've been married, I keep feeling all the time like — like I'm being watched."

His smile was strained. "Well, naturally, in 'Rytheia City, people will tend to — watch. Let's go far away from where people are. There's an island on this planet, way off in the western seas. I'll buy you that island, Lyddy. I'll build you a villa there — a chateau, a castle, whatever you want."

But she shook her golden head. "No, nothing like that. I want to go to another system. It's not that I don't want to be where people are. I like crowds. I just want to be where there are *different* people."

He forced another smile. "What's gotten into you, Lyddy? In the old days, you used to be so calm."

SHE wriggled her shoulders uncomfortably. "I keep seeing things, shadows that shouldn't be there, reflections of nothing. Only, when I turn, they don't get out of the way fast enough to be nothing."

"They?" he repeated.

"I only see one at a time, but I don't know if it's always the same one." She shivered again.

"It must be your nerves." He went on resolutely, "Maybe you do need a change of scene." Actually it was absurd to feel so apprehensive about the Jump. She'd be safer in hyperspace in his ship than anywhere else in the universe. And a large metropolis might provide distractions to take her mind off — shadows. "How would you like to go to Burdon?"

"That would be real nice!" But she was not as enthusiastic about it as he had expected.

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SHE laid a hesitant hand on his arm. "Honey," she began tentatively, "you—you seem to spend so much time all by yourself. Do I bore you?"

'Of course not, dear," he said awkwardly. "It just seems that way to you. Pressure of business..."

"But why do you play chess with yourself all the time?"

"I've spent so much time in space that I got into the habit of playing alone. Many spacemen do that."

She bit her painted lip. "Sometimes – sometimes when you're alone in your room, I hear your voice. Why do you talk to yourself?"

It was an effort for him to meet the beautiful, blank blue eyes. "When you're alone a lot of the time, sweetheart, you have to hear the sound of a voice even if it's your own, or you start hearing voices."

"But you have me," she said. "You're *not* alone. But you still do it."

"Old habits are hard to break, dear."

She looked up at him, trying to force her way past the wall in his eyes. God help her, he thought, if she ever succeeds. "Would you like me to learn to play chess?"

"Would you like to?"

"I – don't know," she murmured doubtfully. "I've never been much good at mind things. But I want to be *everything* to you."

"You are, sweetheart." He stooped and kissed her. "Don't force yourself to do anything you don't want to for my sake. I'm used to playing alone."

"But I want you to do things with *me!*"

"I'll do everything else with you," he promised.

He went to his room and shut the door behind him. But she had heard him talking there, so sounds must carry through. When they got a place of their own, he would have the walls and doors soundproofed. Meanwhile, it would be safer to go to the ship.

As he came out of the hotel door, he collided with a man who looked familiar. It took him a moment to identify the sullen, startled face as belonging to that newest member of his crew, young Something Raines.

"Hello there," he said. "Were you coming to see me?"

"N-no, sir. I was just coming in for a – a pack of Earth smokesticks. I can't stand those *stinking* native brands!" The boy spoke with a viciousness so unsuited to the subject that it was almost funny. He flushed, perhaps realizing this, perhaps remembering that Mattern was reputed to hail from this sector. "It's a question of what you're used to, see?" he mumbled.

"Of course," Mattern agreed

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pleasantly. "This is your first time on Erytheia, is it?"

"Yes, my first time here."

"Are you enjoying it?"

"Well, I dunno exactly." There was doubt in the boy's blue eyes. Something in them seemed familiar, more familiar than just recognizing one of his own crewmen. He had a look of — who? Of Lyddy? But that was absurd.

THE doubt in Raines' face had changed to fear, and Mattern realized that he himself must have been just standing there, staring at him. He laughed. "You're supposed to *enjoy* Erytheia; it's a pleasure planet."

"Well," the boy said, choosing his words with care, "it's a pretty enough place, but it's set up more for people with money. I mean there's nothing here for fellows like me; the pleasure's for the rich people only. Even the smokesticks cost almost twice as much as anywhere else."

"We'll probably be leaving soon, so you'll only have to stick it a little while longer." Mattern's hand went to his pocket, then fell to his side as he saw the look on the boy's face. If Raines was proud, Mattern would not offend him by offering him money. "Maybe you'll find Burdon more to your liking."

"Oh, *yes,* sir!" The young spaceman's face was virtually radiant. *He must have a girl on Burdon,* Mattern thought, amused.

As he walked over to the landing field where his ship was moored, he was troubled by the memory of the boy's voice. Not that it was familiar — but there was the faintest hint of a Far Planets accent. Provincials as a rule didn't go to the terrestrial space schools, but it was, of course, possible. Raines must have had an Earth education, because Mattern followed the rule of the Marine service and never hired a man who didn't have a degree from one of the space schools. He must look at the boy's records as soon as he got a chance.

The Hesperian Queen was not a small vessel. She was one of the newest, fastest, most fully automated models. Moreover, she was large and she glittered like a dwarf star. Lyddy would get a surprise when she came to see the ship.

Mattern greeted the crew member on watch and went up to his luxuriously appointed cabin—suite, really. Inside, a chessboard was set up, as its counterpart was set up in his hotel room, one side in the light from a porthole, the other in a corner full of shadows.

The pieces were not only in position, but a game had been started. Mattern sat down on the bright side and moved a piece.

"Lyddy's aware of you," he told the shadows. "She has no idea of what you are, of course. But she

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knows you're around, kqyres. She's half seen you and it's beginning to bother her. It's beginning to bother me, too."

PART of the shifting grayness flowed over the board. When it receded, a knight had changed its place. "Truly, I have tried to be careful," a quiet, rather tired voice said out of a darkness at the heart of the shadows, an area that was tenuously substant. "Is it certain that you yourself have not in some way given her cause for suspicion?"

"Quite certain. I've watched myself night and day." Mattern smiled ruefully. "Which is damned hard when you're on your honeymoon."

"Is there anyone else who might have spoken of these thing to her?" the kqyres asked.

"No one." Then Mattern remembered the young spaceman he had met coming into the hotel, who seemed to have a look of Lyddy. But that was nonsensical. Looking *like* her didn't mean talking *to* her. In any case, what would Raines know that he could tell her? Silly to be so suspicious. The Golden Apple *was* one of the few places in Erytheia City where one could get Earth smokesticks. "No one," Mattern repeated. "No one at all."

The patterns shifted and darkened. "Then I must be getting careless. I am growing old."

"Anyone can make a slip," Mattern said reassuringly. "Just try to be a little more careful, that's all." He moved a rook.

The grayness crept out over the board, touched a bishop, hesitated, and moved to a pawn. *He is getting old,* Mattern thought pityingly, as he took the pawn. *Once I could never beat him. Now I win two games out of three.*

"But you are content with the woman?" his partner asked anxiously. "You are not disappointed with her in any way? She pleases you as much today as she did when first you set eyes on her?"

"Of course she does! You'd think it was you who'd been dreaming of her all these years, not me."

"I suppose we shared those dreams . . ."

"And you'd never seen her." Mattern stared intently at the shadow. "Are you disappointed, then?"

"Of course not. You know that to me a human woman is merely an object of art. And she *is* very beautiful. But I thought she might not have come up to your expectations. Reality often falls short of dreams." The shadow's voice tautened. "Has she changed much?"

"Very little," Mattern said, absorbed once more in the game. "You'd think only a year or two had passed. Surprising how women do it."

The shadow sighed. "Surprising,"

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it agreed, its voice relaxing. "But then the female sex is mysterious."

THEY played on a while in silence. The kqyres finally spoke. "You will need a lot of money to provide an establishment fitting for so lovely a lady."

"I have a lot of money," Mattern said. "More than enough."

The kqyres flickered so violently that Mattern's eyes hurt. "Not enough for the things she deserves to have. Jewels, palaces, planets . . ."

"One thing I know would make it a lot more comfortable for her," Mattern suggested. "If only you didn't have to be close to me all the time, kqyres. If only you could stay on the ship even when I'm not there. Not that I don't enjoy your company," he added quickly, "but she seems to be highly strung."

"Do you think I like the situation any better than you? But this is the way the mbretersha has ordered it."

"I suppose she knows what she's doing," Mattern sighed. In any case, the mbretersha's orders were absolute and could not be contravened — otherwise, at least one universe might be destroyed. There were still so many things he didn't understand and was not likely to learn.

"Strange," he went on pensively, "that Lyddy should have seen you, when I hardly can, and I *know* you're here." He knew, too, that the kqyres was deliberately vibrating out of phase, so that the horror of his appearance in this continum would be spared not only those he chanced to meet, but also himself. There was always the danger of passing a mirror. Knowing how the kqyres looked in his own universe, knowing how he himself looked in the kqyres' universe, Mattern didn't doubt that any revelation would be a frightful one. However, he couldn't help being curious.

"I still think someone must have told her where to stare," the shadow said, "and what for."

"Don't be absurd!" Mattern snapped, outraged at the idea that his carefully kept secret might not be a secret at all. "Just try to be careful when she's around. Vibrate harder, or something."

"I shall do my poor best." The shadowy one hesitated. "Do you not think that if perhaps you were to tell her the truth —"

"Lord, no!" Mattern exclaimed. "She'd take a fit!"

"Once you would not have spoken of her that way," the kqyres said reproachfully.

"I didn't mean it the way it sounded," Mattern tried to explain. "It's just that — well, by now I hardly remember what the truth is myself."

III

DID that truth go back fifteen years, to the time he had met the kqyres, twenty years to the time

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he had first seen Lyddy? Or even further back than that? Did it go back, say, twenty-four years, to the time when he was sixteen and had killed his stepfather? He could still see Karl Brodek lying there with his head crushed, could still feel the terror rising in him at what he had done . . .

Then he had turned and fled the small community on Fairhurst — one of the Clytemnestra planets — and made for the capital, where he shipped out on one of the small tramp freighters that voyaged among the planets of that system. None of the four other planets was human-inhabitable, but two had mining stations, and one had a native civilization advanced enough to make trading practicable, though not very profitable.

FOR the next four years, he drifted from one tenth-rate ship to another, one ill-paid job to another. In all this time, he never left the Clytemnestra System. As soon as he was satisfied that his former neighbors were not going to set the law on his trail, he had no desire to go away. It wasn't placeliking that kept him; it was dread of the Jump.

Most spacemen never do quite get over their dread of the hyperspace Jump, but with Len the dread amounted almost to a mania. He was ashamed of the feeling, especially since he suspected he'd picked up that extra dollop of terror from the creatures on the native planet.

Self-respecting colonials didn't associate with non-humans, but during those first years of fear that his fellow men were hunting him, he'd felt safe only with the flluska. He learned a little of their language, and he spent such spare time as he had on Liman, their planet. He couldn't breathe the atmosphere, but there were the trading domes; nobody minded if he used them when there was no trade going on.

The flluska were a religious people, with gods and demons similar to those of the terrestrial cosmogonies. Only, while their gods lived conventionally in the sky, their demons lived in hyperspace. Len was too unsophisticated himself to wonder how so primitive a people could have evolved such a concept as hyperspace in their theology. He merely grew to share their terror of it.

The year Len was twenty, the *Perseus,* one of the star freighters that made the long haul from Castor to Capella, found itself in Fairhurst Station short one deckhand. The man they'd shipped out with was in jail, waiting to see whether a manslaughter or assault charge was going to be lodged against him. The ship could not afford to wait. The station was scoured for a replacement and Len Mattern was the best man they could find.

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Normally the starships did not take on untrained hands. Even the lowliest crewman was supposed to have spent a minimum number of years at the space schools, because in theory, all promotions came from the ranks, even in the merchant service. But in spite of his lack of training, they offered him the job. The bigline ships never liked to sail shorthanded; in case of trouble, that could be a basis for legal action.

LEN knew the opportunity offered him was a dazzling one — not only far more money than he'd ever seen before, but the chance of breaking out of the system. He was afraid though, terribly afraid. "I've never made the Jump," he told the second officer in a quavering voice.

"You'll never be a real spaceman until you do." The second officer was patient, because he knew Mattern was his only chance of making the crew up to its full complement.

"I've heard tell that — things change their shapes in Hyperspace."

"Maybe they do; maybe it's their real shapes you see out there. Who's to tell what the truth is?"

Len licked dry lips and tried again. "They say there're people—beings, anyway — *living* in hyperspace." That tale he had heard from spacemen who had made the Jump. Even if he'd believed in the flluska's demons, he would have had the good sense not to admit such a thing to a starship officer — a man of sophistication from the Near Planets, perhaps even Earth herself. Still, spacemen were notorious myth-spinners. Perhaps he had made a fool of himself, anyway.

But the second officer wasn't laughing. "Federation law says we should have nothing to do with the creatures of hyperspace. If we leave them alone, they don't bother us."

It would have been better if the officer had laughed at him and said there was nothing in hyperspace but space. "Will we see them?"

"Does a ship going through ordinary space see any of us?" the officer returned. "The creatures of hyperspace live on their own planets, and we give those planets a wide berth. Simple as that." He added, "What are you so afraid of, boy? Not a ship's been lost in hyperspace for over two centuries, and there haven't been any blowups for years."

"Blowups?" Len repeated.

"Accidents. A technical term. You've taken worse risks shipping out in those tincan tramps."

Finally, Len gave in — to his own common sense more than to the officer's — and signed up for the voyage. He filled out the necessary forms — hundreds of them, it seemed like. When it came to each line for next of kin, he left a blank on every one.

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"Haven't you any relatives at all?" the second officer asked, surprised.

"Not a one." Len didn't bother to mention that half-brother back on Fairhurst; a five-year-old kid isn't much kin to speak of. Besides, the boy probably didn't even know he had a brother — he'd been less than a year old when Len left. One of the barren women must have adopted him and brought him up as her own.

SO Len Mattern filled out all the papers and was inscribed on the ship's rolls. And he made the terrible jump through hyperspace for the first time.

People who traveled on spaceships only as passengers never could understand why the Jump was invariably referred to as "terrible." That was because before the ship made the Jump they'd be given drugs, in their cocktails, in their food at dinner, or in their drinking water — and the next day they'd wake up and find they had slept right through the whole thing, so it couldn't be so awful. Of course those who traveled around the universe a lot were bound to catch on. Someday they'd miss a meal or not drink anything and they'd find themselves awake while the ship was Jumping. But the shipping lines didn't take any chances and the aberrant passengers would also find themselves locked in their cabins with smooth metal shutters where the mirrors used to be.

But one thing that couldn't be helped: They couldn't be stopped from looking down at themselves and seeing extra arms and legs; or finding no arms and legs at all, but tentacles instead; or that their skin had turned into shining scales or that there was an extra eye in the back of their head. And when the time came for another Jump, they would *ask* to be drugged.

However, crewmen couldn't be drugged. They had to be awake to tend the ship. The credo of the Space Service was that you couldn't trust a machine to itself any more than you could trust an extraterrestrial, a non-human. If a man wasn't in charge, ultimately everything would go to pot. That was part of the space tradition, like the primitive axes that hung on the bulkheads, so a man could smash his way to the modern firefighting equipment. Except, of course, that if fire really broke out, it would be quicker to press the button that sent the automatic fire-fighting machines into immediate action. But still the axes hung there, because they had always hung there — and, like all the metal on the ship, they had to be kept polished.

Each time a ship made the Jump, the crewmen stayed awake. They saw space and time change before their eyes. They saw their own fellows turn into monsters. It was an

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awful thing to see, even though they knew it wasn't actually a change, but a shift to another aspect of themselves. Worse than the seeing was the *feeling*. It was like being turned inside out, organ by organ — your heart and your liver and your guts and all the rest, each carefully turned inside out, the way a woman takes off her gloves, smoothing each one with great precision. The hellish part was that it didn't hurt. A man felt as if he were being twisted and wrenched apart, and it didn't hurt, and it was the wrongness of that more than anything else that — well, that was why the pay was so high on the starships. So many of them went mad.

ALL this Len Mattern had heard of and had expected — though no amount of expectation could have braced him for that kind of reality. But there was more to it than he had heard, and it was the extra part that the second officer seemed curiously anxious to deny. "You saw nobody — nothing at the portholes," he told Mattern after that first Jump. "You just imagined it."

Mattern had been a spaceman long enough to be able to distinguish imagination from reality. Perhaps the creatures of hyperspace did live on planets, but it seemed they did not breathe the atmosphere of those planets as human beings breathe air, and so they were not confined to them. They could move around freely in the starless dusk of their universe. And, if there was a pact, then they must be intelligent creatures — though he would have known that anyway, for they spoke to him. He could hear them through the tight walls of the ship — less in his ears than his mind — cajoling, entreating, *promising*. And he shut his ears and his mind, because he was afraid.

At the end of the voyage, he was offered a permanent berth on the *Perseus*. "We don't usually take crewmen from the Far Planets," the second officer said thoughtfully. "They don't have the training needed. But you're a good deckhand."

Len waited tensely, not knowing whether he did want the job or not.

"The universe is opening up and sooner or later we're going to have to start diversifying our crews, take untrained men, maybe even—" the officer hesitated—"extraterrestrials. Sometimes training can restrict a man to the point where he can't think for himself. Main trouble with untrained men, though, is that often they've got too much imagination. They think things that aren't true, see things that aren't there."

"I understand, sir," Mattern said. "I'll keep my imagination stowed away until it's wanted."

From then on, he had seen no

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more at the ports than any of his properly conditioned mates.

IV

LEN Mattern stayed with the *Perseus* over three years. Gradually, from things he observed himself, from things his shipmates told him, he learned what little there was to be known about hyperspace. Everything was different there from normspace; even the mechanical properties of things changed. However, Jumping was safe enough, as long as the spaceships didn't stop. As long as they were only passing through that other universe, they were, in a sense, not actually there, so that the elements of which they were composed would not change, although, to the senses, they seemed to.

Unless, of course, the ship collided with something. Then everything became very real. That was what the pact was for — to make sure they didn't collide. Every spaceship had, locked in the captain's cabin, charts of that other universe — charts which gave, in normspace terms, the coordinates of the hyperspace worlds. That way, when a ship made the Jump, there would be no danger of her materializing inside one of the alien planets and destroying both. Even touching one of the hyperworlds could have a disastrous effect. Only the captains were ever permitted to see these charts; they would be far too dangerous in irresponsible hands.

Len might have grown old in the *Perseus'* service, if the Hesperia System hadn't been one of her stops, and if he hadn't seen Lyddy there.

Hesperia was a small, rose-pink sun surrounded by four planets and the debris of what once was a fifth. Most solar systems in the Galaxy had asteroid belts like that; some time later, Len found out why. Three of Hesperia's four planets were barren rocks. The fourth, Erytheia, was mostly water, calm water, sometimes blue, sometimes — when the sun was high — violet-tinged. There was land, a small continent in the north, where it was always spring, a slightly larger continent in the south, where it was always summer, and that large island in the west which was said to have a climate better than spring and summer combined.

The atmosphere of Erytheia was what they call Earth type — that is, Man could breathe on it. A very inadequate description, though, because men could breathe the atmosphere of Ziegler's Planet, too, only sometimes it almost seemed worthwhile to stop living in order to stop having to breathe Ziegler's air. Erytheia's atmosphere was gentler and purer than the air of Earth. The native fruits were edi-

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ble and the local life-forms were small and amiable. But there wasn't enough land for the establishment of a self-supporting colony; it would have bred itself into poverty within a few generations.

What else could be done with a small paradise in a remote sector of space but turn it into a high-class brothel and gambling casino? Only the very rich could afford to travel so far to look at scenery, and by the time they reached their destination, scenery wasn't enough. They wanted some excitement.

Naturally, the *Perseus* would stop at Hesperia. Naturally, Mattern would see Lyddy, who was one of the seven wonders of that system. She wasn't too many years out from Earth then, and he had never dreamed any woman could be that beautiful.

SHE was long-necked and slender, unlike the women of the Far Planets, who were mostly squat-built and bred for labor. It seemed to him he had seen her before — in a vision, a dream, who knew where? Certainly never in reality. But he could understand why men would travel light-years for her.

The prices she charged were also astronomical. Still, if he put away his money carefully, in a couple of years he ought to be able to save up enough for a night with her. It was a goal, and he'd never had a goal before, even such a small one; everything had been just aimless drifting. He got a tri-di of her and put it up inside the door of his locker and was happy dreaming of her, even if it meant being kidded about her by his shipmates.

When he made the next Jump, he knew for certain that the creatures of hyperspace not only spoke to him through his mind, but could enter it and read it if they chose. He felt very naked and vulnerable. Why couldn't the others on his ship also see the creatures, so that he would not be the sole focus of their attentions?

"Do what we ask," the hyperspacers — the xhindi, they called themselves — said softly, "and you will have enough from just a single voyage to have her for a week, a month, a year. Do what we ask and you can have her for all eternity."

"But all I want is just one night!" he protested.

And they had laughed, and one with a honey-sweet mind had said, "Is that *all* you want, *really* all?" Then they began naming the things a man could want — and they certainly seemed to have a full knowledge of humanity and its most secret desires.

Afterward, Len had started to think. It *would* be nice to have Lyddy all to himself — for a while, anyway. It would be nice to be

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able to buy her pretty dresses and jewelry. There were other things that would also be nice. Maybe he could have his teeth fixed and his leg straightened. His stepfather had broken it the night his mother died and it had never set properly. With money, he could do a lot of things. He hadn't realized there was so much in the universe to be wanted.

Now his wages began to look as picayune as once they had seemed large. He could make more elsewhere, he told himself; he might not be educated, but he had a good mind, plus rapidly dwindling principles. He didn't need the hyperspacers, though. There were plenty of illegal ways of making money within the framework of normspace activities. So he left the secure monotony of the starship to seek an enterprise which would bring in quick and copious profits.

HIS first step was to go see a rather disreputable acquaintance of his, Captain Ludolf Schiemann. Schiemann was an ancient spaceman from Earth, who owned and commanded a ramshackle craft of prehistoric design, held together with spit and spells.

Schiemann operated out of Capella IV with cargoes of whatever he could get. He was able to make a living with the *Valkyrie* only because he would take on jobs that no sane skipper would touch. Some were dangerous; most were illegal into the bargain. The risks were out of all proportion to the profit, which was why the only helper he'd been able to get was Balas — a big, powerful man, not old but mad. He'd been a deckhand on one of the big starships and had broken too early to be entitled to a pension.

Mattern had met old Schiemann at a bar in Burdon, the capital of Capella IV, and had had a few drinks with him whenever the *Perseus* and the *Valkyrie* had happened to hit port at the same time. Schiemann had a favorite joke he kept repeating over and over: "If you ever get sick of the *Perseus*, Lennie — sick of good food and hot water and decent quarters — you can always come to the *Valkyrie*. I'll take care of you."

Now Mattern went to him and said he'd like to take Schiemann up on that offer.

The old man's pale green eyes protruded even further from his head. "You want to leave the *Perseus* for a berth on my ship! You're madder than Balas!"

"Not a berth, Pop," Mattern told him. "A share of her — a half share."

Schiemann grinned. "Now you must think *I'm* crazy, to hand over half my ship just like that. Maybe you'd like me to sign her over to you entirely." And he puffed sav-

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agely upon his Venuswood pipe.

"Look," Len said, "let's not kid ourselves. You're a crook, Pop, but such a lousy crook that you make it look as if crime really doesn't pay. And I'll tell you what's wrong with the way you operate. You have no organization, no system, no imagination. I have 'em all. You contribute the ship; I'll contribute my know-how. Together, we'll make a fortune."

"Modest, aren't you?' the old man jeered. "What kind of know-how do you get working as a deck-hand on a starboat? All right, maybe you're the universe's best metal polisher, but — "

"Look, Pop," Len interrupted, "I'll make a deal with you. We work together for a year. If you don't pull in at least three times the amount you got before, as just your share, my half of the ship reverts to you. What could be fairer than that?"

Schiemann still wasn't convinced that he was not being played for a sucker. Being what he was, he could never expose himself to a court battle, no matter how much justice might be on his side in a particular instance. But he didn't think Len could be so rotten as to figure on something like that. Besides, the old captain couldn't help liking the boy. So he agreed, saying as he did so, "I should have my head examined." But before the fourth voyage was out, he realized that he had never done a wiser thing in his life. Under Len's direction, the *Valkyrie* as a business enterprise was cleaning up.

Only in relative terms, of course. It took six months, over a dozen voyages, before Len managed to save enough for that night with Lyddy. And every time he made the Jump in the *Valkyrie*, the hyperspacers told him, "One night won't be enough," and the honey-minded one had insisted, "You must want more than that. You *must*. Who could be satisfied with so little?"

FINALLY, the night came. It was wonderful, it was ecstasy, it was everything he had dreamed of — but it was too short. "Good-by, honey," Lyddy said as he left, "come back and see me again."

"When you have some more money," she meant. And it was all over.

For her, not for him. He found he couldn't get her out of his mind. One night was not enough. The xhindi had been right. Now he wanted her for his own, for the rest of his life if not for all eternity.

He had no romantic fancies that she would be willing to go off with him for the sake of true love and himself alone. He had seen himself too often in the mirror panel on the door of his tiny cabin, and he looked there now, with a

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chill objectivity. Undersized, crippled, pallid with the unhealthy color that comes from spending too little time in any kind of sunlight, Len Mattern was twenty-four and looked forty. Not even an ordinary woman of the planets could love him, let alone a love goddess.

But a love goddess who loved money could be bought. However, in order to win her, he'd need to have really big money. No matter how efficiently he organized the *Valkyrie's* operations, the ship was just a battered old hulk and, in her sphere, could never be more than small-time. There was only one answer — hyperspace.

He found Schiemann puffing contentedly at his pipe in the *Valkyrie's* control room. "Look, Pop," he said, "we've been wasting our time on stardust. We have to aim for something big."

Schiemann looked trustfully at the young man. He had no relatives, so he had come to think of Len as his son, and, in fact, had made him his heir. "Whatever you say, Lennie. Figure on breaking out of this sector and moving in closer to Earth, do you?"

"Not exactly. We're going into hyperspace."

"Sure," Schiemann said, blowing a smoke ring. "Can't leave the sector without passing through hyperspace; that stands to reason. But where are we Jumping to?"

Len tried to keep the tautening of his body from becoming apparent. "We're not Jumping anywhere. We're *stopping* in hyperspace."

The pipe dropped from the old man's mouth. He caught it in his hand and gave a muffled exclamation as the heat burned his palm. Then he looked at his partner. "Of course you're joking, Lennie." And he arranged his face for laughter.

Len shook his head. "No joke, Pop; I'm dead serious. We're going to take a cargo into hyperspace. To the mem — the mem — oh, hell, I can't pronounce it — the queen, I guess, of Ferr. That's one of their planets. She wants Earth stuff, she says, and she promises to do right by us if we bring it to her. Sounds like a good deal."

THE silence thickened as the two men face each other. At last Schiemann got up. "Look, Lennie, I don't make out I'm a saint. I've smuggled and cheated and stolen. But this I will not do. For the laws of the Federation, I don't give a damn — men made 'em and men can break 'em — but to go against the laws of nature, that is a different thing." He turned on his heel and went out of the control room.

Len went to his cabin and began to pack his gear. As he had expected, Schiemann interrupted him when he was halfway through.

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"What do you think you're doing?"

"Leaving," Len said. "I'm sick of small-time operations."

"Leaving me? Just like that? Does our friendship mean nothing at all to you?"

"Sure it does," Len told him. "When I get a chance, I'll write."

The old man's face crumpled. "Look, Lennie, if we did move into one of the more important sectors, maybe — "

"You know we wouldn't have a chance there," Len said harshly, to conceal his true emotions. "The sectors closer in to Earth have bigger, faster ships, and bigger, tougher men to run 'em. And they wouldn't like us trying to jet in!"

"I'd rather take a chance on that than — "

"We wouldn't *have* a chance; it'd just be a massacre, with us on the receiving end. The only way we can break into the big time ourselves is through hyperspace. We've got to do what's never been done before."

That wasn't quite true, from what the xhindi had told him, but near enough. It had been done before, but not very often, and not very recently. However, it had been done, so it was possible to do. Otherwise he wouldn't think of chancing it . . . or would he?

"Why do you want money so much, Lennie?" Schiemann asked. "What do we need the big-time stuff for? It's nice and quiet and practically secure the way you've got things running for us, almost like we were honest businessmen. So why go looking for trouble?"

"If I'd wanted a quiet life," Len said, "I'd have stuck with the *Perseus*. So don't sing me security."

The hand that held the pipe was trembling. "Look, Lennie, at least give me time to think."

"Okay," Len said. He was, in his way, fond of the old man, but there were bigger things at stake. He had to have Lyddy; he had to have money; he had to have . . . something he couldn't put a name to, but desperately important nonetheless. "I'll give you six months."

AT the end of half a year, Schiemann said no, he positively wouldn't do it. Len said "Good-by." Schiemann said, "All right, but you'll be sorry; we'll all be sorry," and gave in.

So they took the *Valkyrie*, the two of them — and Balas, of course, but naturally nobody would consult a madman — and headed for hyperspace. Len knew exactly where to go, even though he had no charts. The breakthrough he wanted was in their own sector and it had been carefully marked for him in his mind.

Schiemann left all the details to him, even the selection of cargo. Len chose coal. He knew that what the xhindi wanted was normspace materials, but not precisely what

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materials. Their normspace value did not matter, because normspace matter changed to another form of itself when it got to hyperspace, and that was where the possibility of enormous profit came in. Something cheap in normspace could become something quite rare and expensive in hyperspace, and vice versa. The distribution of elements was different between the two universes; each one essentially complemented the other.

There was one hitch: a stable form in normspace could become an unstable one in hyperspace. Without empiric knowledge, it was impossible for anyone going from one universe into the other to tell whether any substance he was carrying or wearing or *was* would remain stable. If unstable, it could turn into liquid or gas; it could turn into energy and blow up; it could cease to be a solid in any one of a number of ways.

As if that weren't bad enough, it could also happen that even a stuff previously proven to be stable in both universes could become unstable, if there was even the trace of a potentially unstable element, or if something that, stable in itself, combined with it in unstable fashion. Such an admixture could be accidental, which was what made the whole business especially tricky, and what made the reason for the inter-universe ban necessary.

The reason why that first load of the *Valkyrie's* had been coal was a simple one. Somewhere, Len had read that coal and diamonds were different forms of the same normspace element, and he'd thought that might carry over into the other continuum. However, even an education wouldn't have helped him know what a right first cargo to take would have been. The xhindi had told him what they did know, but their terminology was not clear. They spoke his language with outward correctness but with imperfect conceptualization; he spoke theirs not at all. Much of what they did know, they appeared to have forgotten, or only half-learned.

They managed to make him understand that certain stuffs would be definitely unsafe; they could not make it clear which stuffs would be safe, or which they would find most desirable as trade goods. He gathered that they would be satisfied with anything that come through. So he chose coal, hoping to make a splendid initial impression.

THE *Valkyrie* reached hyperspace. It slowed down. The throbbing of its creaky engines ebbed to a hum. And it stopped and hung there in the quiet darkness of utterly alien time and place. Schiemann and Balas, expectedly, changed their appear-

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ance, but he had seen them in their monster guises before. The coal changed to something pale and glittering, but not diamonds. Everything remained quiet. The ship's instruments recorded no temperature change, but it seemed to grow colder and colder inside her.

Suddenly, Mattern knew the truth. A trap had been laid for him, and he had tumbled neatly into it. And the most shameful part was that his own desires and yearnings — deliberately fostered by the xhindi — had been the bait.

He wanted to turn to the horrible thing that Schiemann had become to scream, "Let's go back!" But he couldn't. Something held tight grip of his mind. And, looking out the portholes, he saw that the xhindi had begun to swarm.

The flickering terror of their appearance became more awesome to him than it had been at the beginning, when he'd been only a transitory shadow in hyperspace. Now, although he had no doubt that they were friendly — indeed, almost ardent in their welcoming — horror chilled him all over again. He could almost feel the molecules inside his body slow down as his viscera quivered faintly and then froze into stillness.

He looked at Schiemann and Balas. Neither of them could, he knew, see the hyperspacers. Their conditioning back on Earth's space schools had ensured this. That was the real reason for the schools; any actual training was incidental. But Schiemann knew the creatures were there, and so he could sense them. And Balas, too, certainly seemed to sense something as he stood there, tense and wary and almost *understanding*. It must be even worse, Len thought, to *know* the hyperspacers were out there and not be able to see them.

"We — we can still go back," Schiemann said in a cracked voice; apparently the minds outside had not touched his. "Please, Lennie . . ."

"No, it's too late!" Mattern cried. Once he went back, he would never dare return, and all hope of — Lyddy would fade into fog. The thought of not being able to have her was unbearable. "We can't go back now!"

The hideous mask that was Schiemann's hyperspace visage contorted, and drops of liquid flowed where his withered cheeks would have been in normspace. "Please, Lennie. . . ."

"I can't," Len said. "Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. It's too late, now that we've stopped."

He forced out the words, against objections that seemed to come from outside him — not objections to Schiemann's knowing the truth, but to his own admission of it.

"They're in control," he said.

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V

"WE bid you welcome to our universe, Mattern," the xhindi said in his mind. "Come, follow us. We will lead you to the port on Ferr that we have made ready for you."

"Will the ship be safe there?" Mattern asked, remembering the further danger of touching alien substance.

"As safe as she could be anywhere in this space." And then the mellifluous one added, "Remember, whatever risks there are, now we share them with you."

A point of livid light that danced so Mattern knew it must be alive led them to the gleaming purple-dark ovoid that was Ferr, then to the place that had been set aside for the *Valkyrie*. The xhindi had been right about the port so far as the ship herself was concerned. Probably they'd had a fair idea of what materials she and her contents were composed of from the ships that had passed fleetingly through their space, never pausing to become real. What they could not allow for were the random factors.

The ship set down on the "safe" port at Ferr. It made contact with the glossy alien ground. And, as it did so, Captain Schiemann very quietly disintegrated. No explosion, no sound. He simply crumbled into a white powder which slowly drifted away, and then was gone.

"Coal into diamonds," Mattern found himself saying as he stared at Schiemann's pipe rolling on the empty corridor floor, "dust unto dust." When the pipe quivered to a stop, he began to laugh hysterically.

"So you think it's funny, do you?" a gentle voice said behind him.

Mattern turned. Balas stood there.

"I'm afraid that I don't agree," Balas went on with that frightening softness. "He was good to me, and to you too, Lennie. He was damned good to the both of us. And this is the way you repay him. It wasn't a nice thing to do, Lennie."

Mattern opened his mouth to deny intent, but all that came out was the bubbling laughter.

"I know you didn't mean for him to disappear like that," Balas said, almost kindly. "It's just that I guess you don't care what happens to anybody but yourself. No, you don't care for yourself even, just the things you want. You're awful greedy, Lennie — awful greedy."

His voice was very reasonable. "If I don't do something to stop you, you'll do the same thing to our whole universe that you did to the captain. It would be wrong for me to let that happen. So, you

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see, I *have* to kill you. I'm sorry, Lennie, because I like you, but I know you'll understand."

And he lunged for Mattern, reaching out the four monstrous arms that were his in hyperspace, the eye in his forehead brilliant with that hideous sanity.

Mattern backed away, still laughing. *If Balas has gone sane,* he thought, *then perhaps I have gone mad. Only I am still conscious of everything that's going on: the danger I am in, the way I am behaving. In fact, I have control over all of myself except my laughter. I know where we are — Balas and I are locked inside the ship alone together, and only one of us is coming out alive.*

UNDOUBTEDLY the xhindi could have passed through the hull or opened the airlocks in some way, if they had wanted to. But they made no move to try, merely remained outside, watching. The two humans, in that space and time, were alone in a small private war of their own. Mattern could not tell whether the xhindi outside were enjoying themselves, as a group of humans would have under like circumstances, but he seemed to sense anxiety for the outcome — not only of that battle but of another, inner one. *Why, I'm beginning to read their thoughts, too,* he realized, in the middle of his fear and hysteria. *I am growing closer to them by the minute.*

And Balas was getting closer to him. Mattern had a blaster, of course, but he was afraid to use it. A bolt of alien energy might produce a reaction that could rip both universes. Yet, bare-handed, he was no match for the bigger, stronger man. Fortunately, he had never pretended to be a hero, not even to himself in the saneness of normspace, so he was able to turn and run. Balas pursued him through the desolate corridors of the *Valkyrie,* Mattern's laughter echoing crazily in the emptiness.

His only hope was to find a hand weapon — or something that could be used as a hand weapon. And, as he rounded a bend, Mattern saw the primitive fire axe hanging against a bulkhead, the traditional relic that all spaceships, large and small, carried and kept burnished and ready for a use that would never come. But there was another use it could be put to.

Instinct made Mattern seize the axe from its hooks on the wall. Instinct surged up from the handle to fill him with the power and joy and knowledge to use it. He turned to face Balas' onrush, and his laughter no longer sounded insane in his ears; it had the triumphant energy of a primeval war cry.

The madman's charge was lightning fast, but Mattern was the younger man by at least a decade.

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He told himself that he meant only to stun Balas, but he was conscious all the time that, if Balas were merely stunned, the problem would be merely postponed. He lifted the axe and brought it down. And then Mattern was alone, the only human being in an alien space and an alien time, locked in this ship with the drifting white dust that had been his friend, and the bleeding corpse that had been — no, not his enemy, but his friend also, and who had, only minutes after death, already begun to haunt him. It was then that Mattern remembered the other man he had killed in the same way.

Karl Brodek had never haunted him, but that was because Len knew the killing was justified — it was retribution, not murder. For Len had seen Brodek kill his mother, not all at once, but little by little. It was her face that stayed with him always, her blue eyes and her sweet voice. She'd been the only one he ever had, really — the brother had been nothing but a wailing blob of protoplasm — and then Schiemann, a little. Now he was more alone than he'd been in all of his solitary life.

He knew that the eerie creatures outside meant him no harm, but would have liked to comfort him if they could. That made it worse rather than better. If only there were some tangible enemy to attack, to beat his fists against . . . but the only enemy he could find was the monstrous form reflected in the mirror of his own cabin.

He was no longer laughing, he noticed; the fit was over. And so, he sensed, was the anxiety outside. In some way, he had passed a test.

IT was then that the xhindi began to speak to him through the hull of the ship, urging him to come out. "You have come so far," they said, "and time is a precious and a dangerous commodity. We cannot afford to waste it, either of us."

He did not—could not—respond.

They could have forced him out, but they were kind — or perhaps only wise. They simply coaxed and waited. After a while, moving stiffly, as if he had cogs instead of a heart, he opened the airlock and went outside. He set foot on the dark polished surface of Ferr. But there was no thrill of strangeness or of triumph or anticipation. There was . . . nothing. His physical senses were all operating. He knew there was neither gravity nor lack of it. He knew there was no atmosphere — and he accepted that, not because he accepted the xhindi's word that he would not need to breathe in this continuum, but because he didn't care whether or not he breathed; he didn't care about anything.

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"Come," the xhindi said, in audible words now, and their spoken voices were as sweet as their mind voices.

He found himself moving as through a nightmare, as he proceeded according to their directions, and the xhindi themselves, with their monstrous grace and musical voices, were a logical part of the black ballet in which he found himself participating.

The dignitaries of Ferr, a fantasy procession in the moonlit colors of hell — smoke and flame and shadow — came to greet him and to lead him to the mbretersha. She glittered splendidly upon her throne of alien substance — a monster, of course, in human terms, and yet also a great lady, as a queen should be in any terms. Through the fog of his own immediate perception, she reached out and touched him with her dignity and compassion.

"I am very sorry," she said, "that such a thing should have happened. I know you are full of grief for your comrades, and I wish that I could have postponed our interview. However, I must press you, for the longer you stay on this world, the greater the risk is for my people."

Somewhere before, it seemed to him, he had heard her voice — sensed her mind pattern, anyway. If he had not known that she was the mbretersha, he would have fancied that hers had been one of the minds that had spoken to him, the most persuasive of the cajoling creatures that had sung him their siren songs as he flashed transistorily through their universe. But, he thought dully, that was impossible. She was the mbretersha, the queen.

She read his thoughts, and the pattern of her appearance altered subtly. It was a warm and kind expression of herself; it was a smile. "You must learn, Mattern, that the concept of a ruler in this universe differs from the concept in yours. Here a ruler is the servant of her people, not their master. It is her obligation to take care of them, protect them, watch over them — in whatever way seems most fitting to her. She can have no pride in herself, only in them. They are more than her children."

IT was funny, Mattern thought, that she should so easily plan to break the rules of her universe. A space rat like him — that was one thing; it was to be expected. But a queen? Now that he was coming back to life a little, he began to wonder about this again.

Deftly, she picked the wonder out of his mind and answered it. "Our Federation, like yours, is an artificial creation. Its laws are no more than arbitrary regulations, devised by the various peoples of each universe with regard to the

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greatest good of the majority, and thrust upon majority and minority alike."

Mattern began to understand, or thought he did. "A queen isn't likely to hold with democracy," he said — though perhaps not aloud.

She was a little impatient. "It's not a question of absolute power or divine right — simply that my people come first, even before myself; my own world is part of me, and I am part of it by nature and instinct. Its needs are my needs. When my people are hungry, I feel the pangs."

Most rulers justify themselves like that, he thought, keeping his lips pressed firmly together. *But they all do the same things.*

But he couldn't keep her out of his mind. "No," she said, "you're wrong. I was not speaking metaphorically. My nervous system is attuned to my people's; it is a hereditary trait bred into my family. So being the ruler is not a pleasant station to occupy."

It certainly wouldn't be, he thought, if she was telling the truth — to suffer every pang that was suffered on the planet, and, if the attuning were psychic also, every sorrow. He expected her to pick the disbelief out of his mind, but she smiled and went on to tell him about her planet.

Ferr was not a large world. Moreover, it was essentially a barren one. It had been rich only because it had previously engaged in sub-rosa commerce with Mattern's universe. "And the last traffic was long, long ago," she told Mattern. "In a day much before mine, when my mother ruled."

"What happened? What stopped the traffic?"

"Our captain died of old age, and we have had trouble finding a successor to him."

"Why is it so hard to get somebody else?" Mattern asked bluntly.

She paused. When she spoke again, it was so obliquely that he did not realize immediately that it was an answer. "Time was when we had more contact with your people. There were many who knew of the xhindi, although few had actually encountered us. It was not difficult for us to get humans to work with us then. But the barbarians took over your world and your people lost the knowledge of how to get through to us. And when they regained it, we were not why they wished to get through. Much of the problem is in making people believe that we exist."

He nodded. "The filluska call you demons."

"There are still some on Earth who call us demons, Mattern. Your rulers and administrators do not call us demons — no, they are too learned for that — but your Space Service, by means of divers spells

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and conditionings, prevents most of those who pass through hyperspace from seeing and hearing us. And, of those who do, most are too frightened for negotiation."

SHE asked with sorrowful archness, "Are we so terrible in your eyes, Mattern?"

"I don't know," he said slowly, bewilderedly. "Sometimes you are, and I know you will be again. But right now, to me you look — almost beautiful."

There was silence, and, for a moment, he thought that he had offended her.

Then, "Thank you," she said softly. "It is a great compliment."

He was anxious to know why they had chosen him as their human representative. "Weren't there any men who did try to get through?" he asked.

"A few — a very few — reached this space." She added reluctantly, "Some of them proved to lack stability of substance—"

He was angry, at her, and at himself, for not realizing that he had not been chosen. It had merely been a question of survival. "Then you *knew* what could happen to Schiemann!"

"It could have happend to anyone, Mattern. You knew there were risks to be taken. We did not conceal that from you."

And that was true. It had not occurred to him that the risks would not be equally shared by all three members of the ship's company.

The mbretersha continued: "And others of those who come through go mad. We feared that might happen to you, Mattern."

"Others go sane also," he said.

"This is the first time that has happened in my experience. But truly, Mattern, a madman would not seek to reach us."

"I wonder," Mattern said. "I wonder if anybody but a madman would."

This time he had displeased her. There was chill silence, and then: "Time is short. It is best that we return to discussing our business together. Now we will pay you for the merchandise you have brought us with a substance which is stable on Earth — at least it was in times gone by — and which used to become a stuff of considerable value. On your next trip—"

"What makes you think there's going to be a next trip? What makes you think I'm going to come back here again?" He would really have to be a madman to go through that all over again.

The mbretersha smiled. "You will come, Mattern," she said. "You will come when you see how rewarding it is to deal with us. And you will come because—"

"Because of what?" he demanded, more sharply than one should address a queen.

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"Because your kqyres will make sure that you do." The tall, splendidly illuminated being who stood close to her throne bowed as she introduced him: "This is Lord Njeri, who served as kqyres with the previous captain. He will serve with you."

"Kqyres? What's that?" Apprehension quickened inside Mattern. "And what right have you to—"

"Your partner is dead," the mretersha told him. "Lord Njeri is your new partner."

MATTERN stood staring at her. No point protesting further, he knew; he was on her world, in her power. For the time being, he would have to obey her.

"Come, Captain Mattern," said the kqyres. "It is fitting that we superintend the loading of the ship."

So they went back to the port and Mattern watched the xhindi fill the *Valkyrie's* hold with some queer, spongy-looking substance that couldn't possibly be of value anywhere. And beside him stood the kqyres, as he was to be beside him for the next fifteen years.

"If you are disturbed about my effect upon your people when they catch sight of me," the kqyres assured the young man, "you may ease your mind. I shall make myself so that I am barely visible in your universe. Only those who look for me can see me. You need have no fear," he added with a sigh. "I have been through all this before."

"Yeah, that's what she told me," said Mattern grimly.

"It is disloyal of me, I know," the xhind murmured, "but I had hoped the mbretersha would not find a human representative before I died. I am aware of my obligation to my world — but it is not a pleasant prospect to spend one's last years in exile, however honorable."

"Don't worry, as soon as we get to normspace, I'll send you back. I'm not going on with this."

The kqyres seemed to shrug sadly. "You cannot send me back, for I am permanently attached to you. Wherever you go, I go — until the mbretersha chooses to free us, one from the other."

Mattern couldn't believe that. Once he got out of this alien universe, none of its laws could apply to him.

"Secondly," the kqyres informed him, "you will *want* to come back here. When you look at the cargo and see what it is, you will want to come back." He sighed again. "I know your species so well. And I do not fancy they have changed."

VI

WHEN the *Valkyrie* reached normspace, her cargo proved to be the traditional reward—gold.

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Not the most precious metal in the universe any more, certainly, but still valuable. What there was in her hold would come to perhaps as much money as Mattern might, if his luck had held, have amassed in several decades of operating with Schiemann in normspace.

"Well," said the kqyres as Mattern stood goggling at the glowing bullion, "is the payment just?"

"Yeah," Mattern grunted, "fair enough." His mind was working busily: *Captain Schiemann is dead, and so is Balas, so I can't do anything about that. A man's got to have some kind of business. Why shouldn't I go on trading with the xhindi, since I seem to be one of the few people lucky enough to be able to do it? Besides, from what the mbretersha said, I couldn't get out of it even if I wanted to. So why fight? Ethics aside, it's a good deal. I'd make more money that way than any other way. I could see a lot of Lyddy.*

He caught a flicker in the shifting planes of a grayness that the kqyres had become, according to promise.

"I'm thinking the way you want me to think — right, Lord Njeri?" Mattern asked self-mockingly.

"You are thinking the way any reasonable being would think."

Left to his own devices, Mattern would have disposed of the gold as quickly as he could, and then gone back to Erytheia to spend it all on a year or so with Lyddy. She came that expensive.

"And then what would you do?" the kqyres queried.

"Well, then I'd go out to hyperspace and make more, I guess. I know it's a little tough on you," Mattern added apologetically, "but you know how it is; I'm crazy about that woman."

The kqyres evidently did not know, but he made an effort to understand. "And, meanwhile, she will go back to — doing what she has been doing, with other men?"

Mattern frowned. "Yeah, I guess so."

"This procedure is acceptable in terms of your culture?"

"Well," Mattern said, "for women like Lyddy, sure. I mean — oh, hell — it's hard to explain."

"But it doesn't disturb you?"

"All right," Mattern said sullenly, "so it disturbs me. So what can I do about it?"

"Would it not be wiser," the kqyres suggested, "for you to wait until you can get enough money so you can have her for yourself alone? After all, how long would it take for you to get together a sufficient sum at that rate?" And the kqyres indicated the gold.

"You got a point there." Mattern could see that the xhind was right. It would be a lot more sensible to make a few more trips and

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get himself a sizable bankroll before going after Lyddy, so he'd never have to share her again. Otherwise it would be back and forth, back and forth, until it sent him off his mental course.

SO, as soon as he disposed of the gold, he went back with another cargo, and then another. Waiting for Lyddy wasn't as bad as he thought it would be, because he could talk to the kqyres about her. He'd never had somebody he could really talk to; even Captain Schiemann hadn't really been a companion. The kqyres always seemed interested in what Mattern had to say. He never talked much about himself, but he listened patiently to Mattern's description of Lyddy's talents and charms, including some which, as a non-human, he could understand only intellectually, if at all.

And he didn't only listen, with it going in one ear and out the other — or whatever the xhindi had instead of ears. He made helpful suggestions, such as maybe Mattern ought to fix himself up a little before going back for Lyddy.

"I know she is to be — bought," he said, as if he still didn't quite understand what that meant, "but would you not derive greater pleasure from your purchase if you knew you were a man whom a woman could like for his own self?"

Len was silent. He knew the kqyres couldn't understand human concepts of beauty; he had taken Len's own word that the young man wasn't much of a specimen, that his body and his teeth were crooked and his skin bad, his vision defective and his hair drab. Lyddy deserved something better than that; Len knew it himself. Even if she would go with him for the sake of the money, it wasn't the same thing.

"I could get my teeth fixed up in this sector," he said at last, "but I'd need to go to the Near Planets, maybe even Earth, to have my hair fixed. It'd take a long time, and passage costs a hell of a lot. People don't go that far just for a junket, you know. For most of 'em, it's a once-in-a-lifetime deal."

"Of course," Njeri said. "Your wealth is dearly won; you wouldn't want to squander it. However, wouldn't a considerable economy be effected if you went in your own ship?"

"The *Valkyrie!*" Len was shocked into laughter. "She'd never make it to Earth! She'd crumple up like an old paper bag!"

"She will not last much longer, in any case," said Njeri.

Len had been thinking that himself for some time — wondering how soon he would have no ship left at all, and what he would do then.

"It would be wise," the kqyres

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suggested, "for you first to get enough money to pay for a new ship. Only a few more trips should be necessary. Then go to whatever planet you deem most suitable for the necessary improvements, and finally return to Lyddy — a man worthy not only of her but of any woman."

"It'll take so long," Mattern said, tempted, and yet driven wild by the idea of Lyddy, so close to attainment.

"At your age, what are a few more trips?"

Len gave in.

ACTUALLY, it took five trips into hyperspace merely to pay for the new vessel, a much larger and more elaborate model than Len had planned on buying. "In the long run," his partner told him, "the best is most economical. A sound, spaceworthy vessel such as this one will last out your lifetime. And you can call her the *Hesperian Queen*, after Lyddy."

"Why?" Len asked. "Is that what Lyddy is short for?"

"It is the same as naming it after her," the kqyres said shortly. "Only it's a little more subtle."

"Oh." Somehow the kqyres made Len feel stupid, *uncouth* almost, even though he was the human being and the other nothing but hyperextraterrestrial.

The treatments were even costlier than anticipated, and it took many more trips to pay for them. Expenses were increased by the fact that he had to commute back and forth from his sector of space to the planet where he was being treated, since he couldn't afford to neglect his business now that his costs were mounting.

He had his leg straightened on Earth. That world was as colorful, as complex, as intoxicating as it was claimed to be. One series of marvels after another presented themselves before his inexperienced eyes like scenes in a vision show — except that he was actually there, breathing, tasting, feeling a part of this vast sophistication. Earth had many beautiful women, and he enjoyed the favors of those in Lyddy's profession, but only to prove to himself that she was much more wonderful.

He decided there was no point bothering with the other planets; he might as well have his teeth and everything else taken care of on Earth, too. "Very wise of you," the kqyres approved. "The best is always the soundest, and, hence, most worth waiting for. Like Lyddy."

"Yes," Mattern agreed, "she is the best. And the most beautiful."

"Of course," the kqyres said. "Tell me more about her."

And Mattern talked, far into the night. What he couldn't remember of her by now, he imagined, so that the picture should be com-

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plete, not only for the xhind but for himself.

When his leg and his teeth had been fixed, "Why stop at that?" the kqyres asked. "If it had not been for the way that stepfather of yours treated you as a child—" for Len had found himself telling his companion not only about Lyddy but about everything — "you would be a fine-looking man today. It would be no difficult task to have you restored to what you should rightfully be."

MATTERN would not, of course, do such a thing out of vanity. But the more presentable he made himself, the more he would be offering Lyddy. So it would be worth the extra time, especially since he could spend so much of it on Earth. Lyddy had come from Earth; it would be a bond between them later.

Doctors and cosmetologists got to work on him. Each treatment seemed to be lengthier than the preceding one, and more expensive. He could, however, easily afford it — all he had to do was make more trips. The kqyres not only told him what cargoes to take but advised him on the investments to make with his profits.

They did very well together. As far as Mattern was concerned, they did fabulously well, because he had to make enough on his side to counterbalance the entire expenses of a planet on the other. The thought impressed him. *I am, in a sense, equal to the mbretersha,* he thought, *and she is a monarch.* As a result, he walked a little more erect than even the operations had rendered him.

The dangers of his trade grew less and less frightening as he came to know his way between the universes, even though, at the same time, he began to realize how great those dangers were. He had not conceived of their immensity before. The reason there were asteroid belts in so many of the solar systems, he learned now, was that the xhindi had traded with other intelligent races in earlier eras, and there had been accidents. Those races were now extinct.

The xhindi themselves ceased to be monstrous in his eyes. He grew to accept their appearance as perfectly natural in their universe. Toward the kqyres, he came to feel something of what he had felt toward Schiemann, except that where Schiemann had looked up to him and relied on him, he found himself increasingly dependent on Njeri. He told him all his hopes and ambitions, and the kqyres listened attentively. Mattern tried to explain to him how he himself felt about Lyddy, and the kqyres tried to understand.

The kqyres taught Mattern how to play chess. "But that's our

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game!" Mattern said. "I mean we play it in our universe!"

"In ours also," the xhind smiled. "Who knows whether it came from our universe to yours, or yours to ours? Nor does it matter. It is an old game and a good one."

Mattern became increasingly skillful at it. He was pleased that there was an intellectual activity in which he could engage as an equal with the kqyres, and the kqyres seemed pleased, too.

WHEN the treatments were over, Mattern looked in a mirror. He was straight; he was handsome. His skin was clear, his eyes bright. He looked less than his age. Now he could go back to Lyddy, assured that most women would find his physical appearance more than acceptable.

But he found himself hesitating. Only his physical appearance would be truly acceptable. There was something still lacking in him. His body was right, but the way he stood, the way he moved, the way he spoke, all these were wrong.

"I'm not finished yet," he said stumblingly to the kqyres, "not quite straightened out. I ought to be more — well, more smooth."

"You do lack polish," the kqyres admitted, "although you are far less awkward, shall we say, than when we first met."

"That's because of you, Njeri!" Mattern declared, with genuine gratitude. "You've taught me a lot!" And he looked at his outlandish friend with a great affection.

The kqyres seemed quite moved; he flickered like a pinwheel. "You have been an exceedingly apt pupil, Mattern. When first I saw you, I did not think it possible that I should ever consider you a companion. However, I have found myself taking an increasing pleasure in your company. Sometimes I even forget you are a human."

Mattern could not speak; he was so overwhelmed by the tribute.

"The passage of time disclosed to me that there were sensitivities and perceptions beneath that — forgive me, but we know how misleading first impressions can be — boorish exterior. The very fact that you are conscious of your own deficiencies *proves* that you are more than the mere clod you still, on occasion, seem to be—"

"Can't I improve myself that way, too?" Mattern asked plaintively. "Can't I make myself worthy of Lyddy in every way?"

"Of course you can," the kqyres beamed. "Were you to apply yourself specifically to the acquisition of culture, I am sure you could become as polished as any human being can hope to be. But it will take time."

"Well," Mattern said, "Lyddy's

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waited so long, she can wait a little longer. Things worth having are worth waiting for."

Under Njeri's tutelage, Mattern cultivated the arts and the amenities. As he used his ship for a permanent residence, it was there that he housed his growing collection of costly rare objects of art, and his library, notable for its first editions — not only of tapes, but of books. His uniforms were cut by the best terrestrial tailors and he took kinescope courses in the liberal arts and social forms from the outstanding universities of Earth. The provincial twang vanished from his speech; he developed a taste for wine and conversation. Nobody, seeing him, could ever have fancied him once a poor wizened space rat.

AS the years went by, he grew to become as much of a ruler in his way as the mbretersha in hers. She ruled one planet, he told himself, but he had a business empire farflung over many planets — all of which, to some extent, he did rule through his investments. He would have worlds to lay at Lyddy's feet now, he thought complacently. No man could offer any woman more.

The first *Hesperian Queen* didn't have a chance to last out his lifetime; he kept trading her in for another and yet another model, as better, faster, more luxurious starships were developed. Finally, he outbid the Federation Government itself for plans of the latest-model spacecraft. When the government protested, he graciously gave them copies free of all charge. "I merely wanted to be sure that I had the best ship available," he explained. "I have no objection to your having it also. But I knew that you could not afford to be as generous as I can."

He never had more than one ship, because it was too dangerous to run more than one cargo at a time. His crew was always as small in number as possible. He would have preferred none at all; actually, all spaceships could run themselves, for the controls were completely automatic. But regulations said there had to be a crew, both for the sake of "face" — many extraterrestrials couldn't seem to recognize the authority of machines — and because a power failure was not inconceivable.

So the *Hesperian Queen* carried four men. And, whenever she made the Jump through hyperspace, even the crew — though conditioned on Earth — was drugged. Mattern carried on alone. And if, when the crewmen awakened, they found that a day had passed when only an hour should have gone by, they knew better than to ask questions.

So the years went by — busy, pleasant, profitable years. The

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image of Lyddy was always before him, inspiring him to further efforts. *Someday soon I will go back to her,* he would tell himself. On his latest birthday, he looked in the mirror closely. At twenty-four, he had appeared forty; at forty, he could have passed for thirty. Sixteen years had gone by since that night with Lyddy. Now he was worthy of her or anyone.

"I think it's time I went back for her," he told the kqyres.

"For whom?" the kqyres asked; then added hastily, "Oh, yes, of course, Lyddy. We'll do that right after we come back from the Vega System. There's a little Earth-type planet out there—"

"*Before* we go to Vega," Mattern interrupted. "Now."

"But why the hurry? You've waited so long already—"

"I've waited too long. I'm not young any more."

"Neither is she," observed the kqyres. "Perhaps she is *too* old now, Mattern."

"She can't be too old," Mattern said. The tridi in his locker was Lyddy, and the picture was young; therefore, Lyddy must still be young.

"She may have married someone else. She may have numerous children clustering about her knee."

"Then I will take her away from her husband and children," Mattern declared. "Can you imagine that a little thing like that would stop me?"

"She may have lost her beauty," the kqyres said. "She may have left Hesperia. She may have suffered a disfiguring accident."

MATTERN realized then that Njeri was deliberately trying to keep him from going back to Lyddy. Either he felt that she would interfere with the smooth operation of their business, or he was jealous of a third intruding into their company.

"I have done everything I did for the sake of winning Lyddy," Mattern said, biting off the words. "If all hope of her is gone, then my whole reason for working with you is gone. I will never go back to hyperspace."

"There are other women—"

"Not for me!"

"The business itself means nothing to you?" There was an aggrieved note in the kqyres' voice.

"It's just a living," Mattern said, "just a way of getting Lyddy. You know that was why I went into it. I thought you'd been listening to me all these years."

"I thought perhaps with the deepening of your interests—"

"They have only made me love her the more profoundly."

The kqyres took the equivalent of a deep breath. "You do not have a house or any regular place of residence. You cannot expect

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a lady to live permanently on a spaceship."

"I will build her a house."

"Will it not show her how carefully you have prepared for her if, first, you build her a palace worthy—"

"I have no time to build palaces."

"There is a tiny planet that circles the dim sun you call Van Maanen's star," the alien persisted. "It is always twilight there. The beings who live on that planet build crystal towers miles high and as fragile as spun glass, in dusk colors the rainbow never dreamed of."

"If she wants a crystal tower, I will have one built for her. But first I will ask her."

"Very well," the kqyres sighed, "since nothing else will satisfy you, let us return and fetch her."

And when they got to Erytheia City, Lyddy was still there, not only unmarried, but — in spite of all the years — unchanged.

VII

AND now Mattern had been her husband for several months. He had begun to know her, and he realized that she could never be let known the truth about his life and his work. She would be frightened, and, if there was any emotion left over in her, angry.

He told the kqyres: "I've been thinking of taking Lyddy to Burdon. She might find distractions there that will take her mind off — things it shouldn't be on. What do you think of the idea?"

"I cannot tell," the kqyres replied doubtfully. "I have a curious feeling . . . "

"That *what?*" Mattern prompted him anxiously. It was the first time he had seen the kqyres definitely at a loss, although it had seemed to him of recent months that the xhind's assurance was beginning to ebb.

". . . that I am getting too old for my work," the kqyres finished.

"Nonsense!" Mattern cried. The kqyres was his tower of strength; he *would* not conceive of any weakness in him. It would mean that he would be forced to rely upon himself. *And yet,* he thought, *I am certainly old and experienced enough by now to begin relying upon myself. In fact, I'm getting a little old and tired, too.*

"You know," he said to his partner, "maybe we both ought to retire."

"What do you mean?"

"You've been at this long enough and I've got all the money I want. We can see each other sometimes; no reason why I couldn't go into hyperspace just to visit."

The kqyres paled to pearl. "Now that you have Lyddy, you

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don't want anything else at all?"

"Now that I have Lyddy, what else is there to want?"

The kqyres flickered anxiously. "But the mbretersha has commanded—"

Mattern smiled. "Her commands don't hold good in this universe. You know that. When I was a kid, she could fool me into believing she had a hold over me. But the hold is a psychological one; that's the only thing that could carry over from universe to universe. And I'm strong enough to break it now."

Although he was not quite serious, it might be, he thought, that the hyperspace trade and the trips to Ferr had spoiled him for everyday life, made him too restless for the mundanities of any world. And it was time for him to settle down now.

He let the kqyres win the game, and then he stood up. "I'd better start getting things ready for the trip to Burdon."

"You've definitely decided to go?"

"Yes," Mattern said, pleased with himself, "definitely."

He went to the control room and got out the forms that would need to be filled out before the ship could leave port. Suddenly he remembered his puzzlement about the young spaceman — what was his name? — Raines? He pressed a button on the file, and the boy's records flashed up at him. At first they seemed to be in order: *Alard Raines, aged twenty-five, educated on Earth,* well and good. But *born on Earth* . . . Mattern was almost positive that could never have been, not from the way the young man spoke. And one false statement meant that the whole record was false.

However, he could not challenge the discrepancy before they left for Capella. If he spoke to Raines, he'd probably have to dismiss him then and there. It would be difficult to find a suitable replacement in Erytheia City. He might have to send for someone from Earth, which would take months, perhaps a year. First he'd take the *Queen* to Burdon, he decided, and then he would fire Raines.

NEARLY three weeks went by before they could leave. Mattern found himself looking forward with some impatience to Burdon. When Lyddy had a house of her own that she could take an interest in, he told himself, things would be different; she would be different. This way she was bored much of the time, and boredom is contagious.

"I've 'vised ahead to Capella, dear," he told her as they boarded ship, "and rented a furnished multiplex, so we'll have some place to stay."

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"Yes, honey," she said, with a strange lack of interest. She didn't even seem surprised at the size of the ship. Underneath her elaborate makeup, she was pale; her body was trembling. She saw that an explanation was necessary. "It's been so long since I made the Jump. Silly of me to be so nervous, but you do hear things about hyperspace . . ."

"You're safer in my ship than anywhere else."

"Yes, I know." Was she merely expressing trust in him, or was there more to her words than that?

At first he was just vaguely suspicious. Then, the second day out, he noticed that Lyddy and Raines seemed to be together a good deal more of the time than chance would account for, and his suspicions secured a focus. The two had some kind of unspoken understanding, he thought, watching them as much out of curiosity as anger. *I have become chilled with the years of alien company,* he thought. *I am incapable of true passion; perhaps that is what she seeks in another.*

But, though he might find excuses for her, he would not condone her. A bargain was a bargain. At the end of the first week, he said to her one evening, as he sat on the edge of the bed, watching her brush her long, thick gilded hair, "Darling, I'm a little worried about one of my crewmen."

Lyddy didn't turn from the jeweled dressing table he'd had especially installed for her. "Which one?" she asked.

"Young Raines. Do you know which he is?"

"Yes." She paused. "There's only one young one. Why are you worried about him? Do you think he's sick or something?" But that was the question she should have asked *before* asking the man's identity.

Mattern let a moment elapse, then said, "His papers appear to be forged."

He glanced at the reflection of her face, but it held neither relief nor fear, merely its usual sweet emptiness. "Maybe he needed a job real bad," she said.

"Maybe," her husband agreed, "but why use forged papers?"

"He might of gotten into some kind of trouble — you know how boys are."

"I'd hardly care to employ the kind of spaceman who gets into trouble serious enough for him to lose his papers. You have to do something pretty drastic to get them taken away, you know."

She said nothing.

HE went on, "What I'm beginning to suspect is that he isn't really a trained spaceman at all, that he didn't go to any of the Earth space schools."

"Do you have to go to an Earth space school to be a spaceman?

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Can't you study somewhere else?"

"Earth's the only place where they give the conditioning." He told the truth, figuring she wouldn't understand.

She turned to look at him. "That's so the men shouldn't — see the things outside when they go through hyperspace, isn't it?"

Mattern was somewhat taken aback. "How did you know? It's not public information."

She shrugged and turned back to the dressing table. "I've known a lot of spacemen, hon."

Her face was pale, but why just now? He wondered just what Raines had told her — how much the boy actually knew. Naturally there could be only one possible reason he had chosen Lyddy as his confidante.

"There's something between you and Raines, isn't there?" he asked.

There was a slight delay. Then her laughter shrilled through the cabin. "Don't be silly, hon; I hardly know the man! All I've done was speak to him a couple of times!" She got up and put her soft arms around her husband. "You're jealous, Len," she said, and there was complacency mixed with the fright in her eyes.

He felt a pang of disgust, but tried not to let it show. Gently, he put her away from him.

"But that's so silly," she murmured. "How could I prefer a dumb pimply kid to you?"

In theory, that was quite true, but Len knew women had strange tastes. And possibly "a dumb pimply kid" *had* more to offer her emotionally and, in reverse, intellectually, than he had. It was not impossible that she was telling the truth, but Mattern could not, of course, believe her. And there was no point in making a further issue of it now. When they reached Burdon, he would fire Raines simply on the basis of the forged papers. No need to bring Lyddy into it at all. So that problem would be easily solved, but what of the others?

He went to play chess with the kqyres. "I trust you have got over your whimsical notion to retire," the xhind said hopefully.

"No," Len told him maliciously, "I've practically made up my mind to quit. There doesn't seem to be any point to it any more."

"The woman *has* changed! That's the whole trouble, isn't it? Even though it's not apparent, in some way she has changed?"

"No," Len said again, "she hasn't changed at all. In fact, I think that's what the trouble is. She hasn't changed, but *I* have."

"I never thought of that," the kqyres confessed.

THE night of the Jump, Mattern turned in at the kqyres' suggestion. "For once, your men can take care of the ship," the

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xhind said, "since there will be no trading stop." Lyddy would be drugged, but Mattern would not need drugs, for hyperspace held no more horrors for him. Or so he thought.

But that night he was awakened by the sound of a screaming so hideous that, if he hadn't known voices don't change during the hyperjump, he would be tempted to think it was one result of the law of mutability — so monstrous were these shrill, worse-than-animal cries.

HE rushed out of his cabin. In the corridor stood Lyddy, still screaming, her face contorted with terror that only the sight of Alard Raines standing there in his normal shape let Mattern know that they had already passed the Jump.

The shrieking separated into words. "I saw it! It was horrible!" And she made an ugly noise in her throat. "You were right, Alard. It's true! There's a monster on board and it did something *awful* to me . . ." Her voice ebbed to a bubble as she looked down at her body beneath the thin veil of fabric and found the same voluptuous curves she had started out with.

Mattern sighed. "Better come into my cabin, Lyddy." And then he jerked his head at Raines. "You come, too." He paused in the doorway when he saw there was no need for privacy. "Where are the other crewmen?"

"Asleep," Raines said. "Drugged. As usual. Who do you think you're fooling, anyway?"

Mattern was too disturbed at the news to take notice of the boy's manner. "But they weren't supposed to be drugged this trip! And who's in charge then? *You?*"

Raines flushed and struggled to pronounce the word he wanted to use in return. 'Your kek — kqyres, I'd say, is in charge. Like he always has been," he concluded triumphantly.

Mattern shut the cabin door behind the three of them. Lyddy went over and sat down on the edge of the bunk, quieter now that she found her personal transformation had been ephemeral. Seeing a monster is not, after all, anywhere near as bad as being a monster. Her fright dimmed and was outshone by a strong sense of personal injury.

"I thought all Alard's talk of kek-kek-monsters was just superstition," she babbled, "but it's *true*. I saw that thing with my own eyes and it's *hideous!* Len, *why* do you have it on board, especially when *I'm* here?"

"I have to," Len said. "He's my partner."

Her blue eyes widened in shock. "Then you've been doing more than just *trading* with the hyper-

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spacers. You'e been *associating* with them, and they're even worse than extraterrestrials because they're so much more — extra-terrestrial!"

She went on talking in this vein, but Mattern ignored her and turned his attention to the boy. "I suppose you told her not to eat or drink anything so she'd see the hyperspacer?"

Raines nodded, his face essaying contempt but imperfectly concealing terror.

"And I suppose you yourself did the same thing, not knowing the men weren't going to be drugged this trip?" Len sat down behind his writing table and looked thoughtfully at the young man. "You must have done the same thing before, on other trips, to know as much as you seem to. You must have heard and seen a great deal, eh?"

"Plenty," Raines said, through brave, stiff lips. "Plenty."

Obviously the boy hates me, Mattern thought. *But why? Is Lyddy enough reason?*

"WHY did you bring her into this?" he asked, almost mildly.

Lyddy didn't give Alard a chance to answer. "Because he wanted me to see you as you really are!" she shrieked.

The boy shuffled his feet. "I had to tell somebody."

"Why my wife, though? She owes you nothing; she owes me everything. The first woman of the streets you picked up would have made a safer confidante."

"Maybe I trusted her."

"Maybe you had no right to trust her!" Mattern cried, almost with sincerity. "It would have been wrong of her not to tell me."

"Maybe it was because I — I love her," Alard said, looking down at the thick rugs that covered the cabin floor. "If you fall in love with somebody, you tell them things."

Mattern couldn't help smiling. "I never do," he said.

"Maybe you've never been in love. Maybe you don't have any human feelings at all."

There was an uncomfortable feeling in Mattern's shoulders, as if his tailor had made a mistake for once. Had he, during sixteen years of alien trade, changed into something not quite human? Was there then a solid basis for the anti-extraterrestrial prejudice? He picked up a slender, sharp thike and ran his thumb absent-mindedly along the blade. Alard stiffened in his effort not to flush.

Mattern smiled and laid the thike down on the table. It was only a paperknife and had never been used for anything more. If he ever had need for such a thing to be done, the time was long past when he would have needed to do

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it himself. He looked at the crewman.

"One would almost think you told my wife because you wanted her to tell me," he suggested.

"That's ridiculous!" Alard flashed. "I may be a fool, but not that much of a fool!"

"Why are you on my ship with forged papers then?" Mattern demanded.

"I wanted — I wanted to bring you to justice."

"By committing a crime yourself? Surely a roundabout way. And why have you taken it upon yourself to help rid humanity of me?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Alard asked. "I'm a human being; isn't that enough? But, as a matter of fact, that wasn't the reason I came to your ship. I only found out later what you were doing."

Mattern waited patiently.

"You killed my father!" the boy burst out. And then tension seemed to ebb from him, as if the worst had happened. "So now you know who I am!"

Mattern picked his words delicately. "If you have proof that I murdered your father, why don't you prosecute? There's no statute of limitation on murder on any of the planets. Or don't you have proof?"

Alard's voice broke slightly. "Everybody on Fairhurst knows you killed him, but they won't do anything about it. They say he deserved what he got."

MATTERN sighed, knowing now who the young man was. His brother. Another responsibility, another vain tie. "How do you know, he didn't deserve what he got?" Mattern asked.

Suddenly Alard grew shy. He lowered his eyes to the rug again. "Because *I* didn't deserve what *I* got."

And there, Mattern thought, Alard had him. Whatever the boy was now, he certainly had not deserved what he'd got then. *But I was only sixteen,* Mattern argued with himself; *how could I have been held responsible?* And then he told himself, *You haven't been sixteen for twenty-four years.*

"I thought one of the women in the village would have adopted you," he said.

"One of 'em did. They took me away from her after she beat me so hard she practically killed me. Every little thing I did wrong, she said it was the bad blood coming out in me, and beat me so hard the blood did come. I went from one family to another, but nobody really wanted me." His voice cracked wide across. "You don't know what it's like to grow up with nobody caring for you!"

"It so happens I do," Mattern said, "but I can't expect you to believe me."

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Alard wasn't interested in Mattern's life story; he wanted to wallow in his own in front of a captive audience. "The only hope I had was that you would come back for me some day. They told me you were probably dead, but I wouldn't believe it, see? It was all I had to hang onto."

"I thought you were part of a family," Mattern tried to defend himself. "I thought you belonged to somebody." He almost convinced himself that this was true, but, at the back of his mind, something whispered, *You ditched him.*

"When I was sixteen, like you'd been, I ran away to look for you. I found out where you'd gone and I followed. I even stayed a while with the flluska. I liked them better than my own people. They said I should try looking for you in hyperspace."

"They are a very wise people," Mattern said.

Alard hadn't had his brother's luck. None of the great starships offered him a berth. But there were unchartered vessels — smugglers and pirates and worse — that would hire anybody who didn't value his life very highly and knew how to keep his mouth shut. He got jobs on them. And as the bandit ships he sailed on took Jumps closer and closer in to the more sophisticated sectors, Alard began to hear of a Len Mattern. It took him a long time before he could bring himself to believe that this king of finance was the brother whom he had imagined finding derelict and penniless. Instead, he was rich and oblivious, not needing anything the younger man could give him.

It was then that Alard determined revenge. It took him years to save up enough money to buy the false papers he needed — more years to buy his way into Mattern's crew. And, finally, he had achieved his end; he was there.

"BUT you've been with me almost a year now," Mattern pointed out, "and done nothing except talk to Lyddy against me. What were you planning to do?"

"I don't know," the boy said hopelessly. "Lots of times I thought of killing you, but then I'd be killing the only relative I had."

"You could have told me who you were. I'd have done something for you."

Alard's eyes blazed. "Yes, you *would* have. When it's easy, when it wouldn't mean a damn thing to you, you'd do something for me!"

Len pulled out a smokestick and offered it to the boy. Alard shook his head impatiently. Len lit one for himself. Neither of them said anything.

Lyddy was sobbing softly. "You never really loved me," she whimpered. "It was just a way of getting back at Len."

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Alard looked away from her, met his brother's eye, and dropped his gaze to the rug, without denying the impeachment.

Mattern exhaled smoke. "All right, you had a grudge against me, but what did you have against her? If you *were* using her to get back at me, then I think you have no cause to reproach me for anything I did. Maybe your foster-mother was right; there *is* bad blood in the family."

The young spaceman was still silent.

Lyddy lifted her head. There was resolution on her tear-smudged face. "I'm going to leave you, Len! I can't go on living with a man who does the awful, evil, *unnatural* things you do . . ." Her voice petered out as her vocabulary proved unequal to her emotions. *Poor Lyddy,* he thought. And then, *Poor Len, with emotions unequal to his vocabulary.*

"Everything I did, I did for your sake, Lyddy," he told her softly, but no longer with any hope of her comprehension. "It was because I was poor and couldn't afford your love that I went into hyperspace." He couldn't help adding, "Doesn't it mean anything to you that I risked a whole universe for your sake, and that now I have worlds to offer you?"

"Don't put the blame on *me,* Len Mattern!" Angry tears stood in her eyes. "I never wanted anybody to do *that* much for me. All I wanted were nice things and somebody to take care of me and maybe love me. I never wanted to have the whole universe risked for me." Her voice broke on the truth. "Nobody's worth all that!"

She was right, he thought — being given too much can be worse than being given too little. The words spilled out of her; he'd been so disenchanted by her stupidity that he gave her credit for less understanding than she did have.

"You wouldn't've been able to wait fifteen-sixteen years for me if you really loved me. But you were *happy* the way you were — you and that extraterrestrial of yours. All you wanted was to dream about me. You were a fool ever to have come back for me; you shoulda stuck with your dreams."

AND again, he knew, she was right. He felt very tired and empty, the way he'd felt after Schiemann and Balas had died, as if nothing mattered any more. He didn't argue with her.

"What would you do if you left me, Lyddy?" he asked gently.

"I can always —" she swallowed — "go back to my old job, I guess."

Alard gave an exclamation of horror; and Mattern agreed in his mind that that solution would never do. Beyond a doubt, she was his responsibility. And so was

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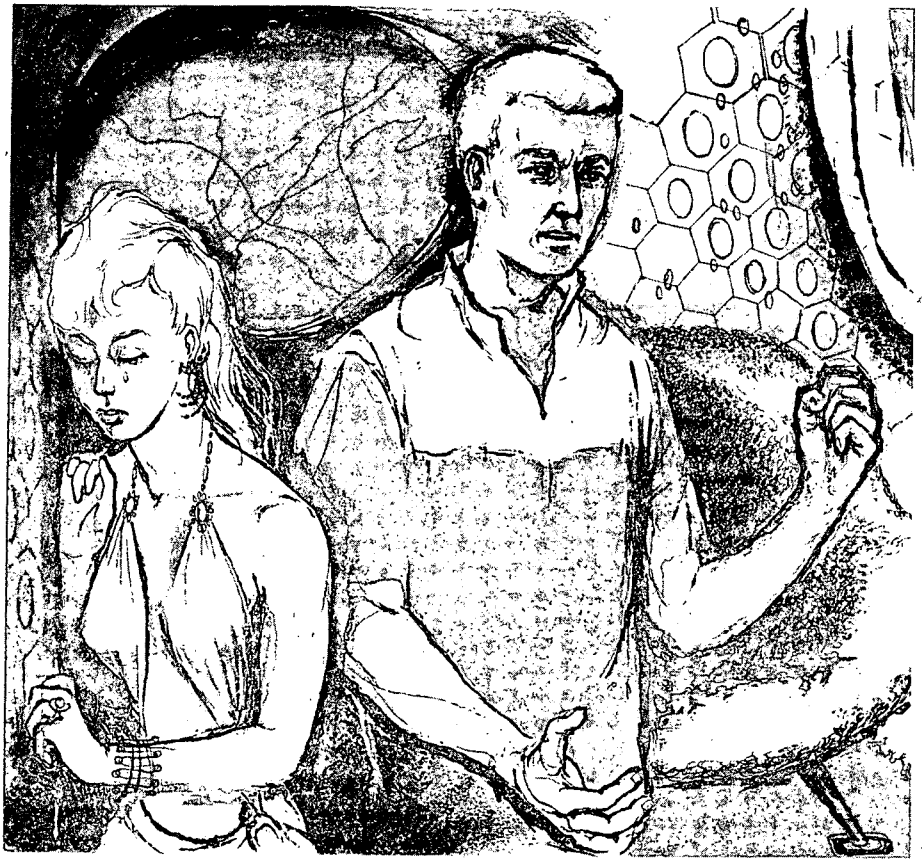

Alard. Why had he ever longed for a family?

And then an outside mind joined in with his and he knew what to do.

"Alard," he said, "before, I offered to do something for you. Now I'm not going to do anything for you, not a damn thing."

Alard drew himself erect. "I wouldn't expect you to, see? Even if you wanted to, I wouldn't take —"

"I want you to do something for me," Mattern cut in.

Alard paled, then flushed with anger. "If this is some half-baked way of thinking you can make

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up for things without me feeling—"

"Hear me out before you leap to conclusions. You said that you loved my wife . . ."

Lyddy gave a moan. "You know he was only stringing me along to get back at you."

"He wouldn't have done that," said Mattern. "Not a fine, upstanding boy like Alard, no matter how much he hated me. You really love Lyddy, don't you, Alard — as you said before?"

The boy looked frightened. "Only in a manner of speaking," he said quickly. "I was trying to make you jealous. I think of her as a sister — a sister-in-law."

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"She's very beautiful," Mattern reminded him. And the xhindi *had* done their work well. She hadn't changed; they had preserved her for him just as she had been sixteen years before. If only they had let her change, then things might have worked out. They could have kept the body from growing old without holding back the mind — or had they not held back the mind? Was this the fullest maturity it was capable of?

"A man who has her as his wife should be very happy," Mattern pointed out. "You wouldn't want her to go back to what she'd been doing, and she won't stay with me."

"Yes, sure." There was a desperate note in the boy's voice. "But she's not young. I mean for me — although, of course, she *looks* young," he added, with a wild glance in her direction. "And she's not very — she isn't —"

Mattern got up and put his hand on his brother's shoulder. "Then if you feel that way about her and do as I ask, it will really be a favor to me."

"Why should I do you a favor?" Alard demanded. His eyes darted back and forth like an animal that is beginning to realize it is caught in a trap.

"To prove you're the better man," Mattern told him. "To heap coals of fire on my head. To prove that if there's bad blood in the family, it exists only in me."

Alard didn't ask what Mattern wanted him to do. He knew already.

MATTERN put it into words: "I want you to take her with you."

"Take her," Alard repeated numbly. "Where?"

"Anywhere she wants to go — to Earth or back to Erytheia, or any one of the planets she chooses."

"Will she go with me?" Alard challenged. "You have to ask her; she has the right —"

"Oh, I'll go with you, Alard," Lyddy interrupted joyfully. "I'd go with anybody right now, but especially you."

"Even if you know I love you only as a sister?"

"That's better than nothing," Lyddy said. "Besides, you could change your mind. I think you and me have a lot more in common than him and me."

"I want to make sure there will always be someone to take care of her, to watch over her," Mattern told his brother. "Funny, I wouldn't have done what I did except for the sake of winning her, and now that I've won her, I can't hold her because of what I did to get her. But she was my dream and I want her to be cherished."

"That's noble of you, Len," Lyddy said. "I'll think of you often, and I won't be mad at you." She

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got up and linked her arm in Alard's. "You'll take good care of me, won't you, hon?"

But it was to his brother that Alard spoke. "I'll take good care of her," he promised, his voice thick with an emotion that was one part sentiment, one part resignation.

"Splendid," Mattern said. "I wouldn't want her to be cast adrift. She knows so little of any of the worlds outside her own restricted sphere."

"Sure," Alard replied miserably, "I understand. I'll do my best."

Mattern got up and put out his hand and, after a little hesitation, Alard took it.

"I hope in time you'll come to forgive me," Mattern said, "and that your hatred will dwindle into dislike, perhaps even tolerance."

"Oh, I don't hate you any more," Alard assured him. "I guess, in your way, you've had as much to put up with as I did." He frowned in perplexity. "But why did it have to be me?"

"You'll change your mind about that, too," Mattern said comfortably. "Lyddy is a very accomplished woman."

VIII

HE felt quite cheerful as he left the two together in his cabin. At long last, he was free of responsibility, of illusion, of dreams. He didn't need a woman; it would be wrong for him to expect a woman to live with the kqyres, even unwittingly. Love was for the very young; he had his work. And now that he was free of all these vexing human entanglements, he'd be able to take hold of the business the way he should have been doing all along. The kqyres *was* getting old; it was time to assume the details of management himself. There were quite a few areas of operation which could become even more productive if the business was thoroughly reorganized.

Mattern went up to the control room. The kqyres was there, which was not his usual place. Perhaps Alard had been right when he said it was Njeri who had drugged the other crewmen and taken control of the ship. Presently, Mattern would ask him why, but there were other matters to be discussed first.

"Well," Mattern said, flinging himself into a chair, "Lyddy seems to be disposed of satisfactorily." He gave a rueful laugh. "I take it you had a hand in the arrangements. That was only fair — she's your creation." He waved his smokestick at the xhind. "However, I'm warning you, I won't let myself be manipulated any more. You're through pushing me around."

The kqyres seemed almost offended. Then there came a soft

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chuckle. "Manipulated, nonsense! We merely deluded you a little, in the same manner you were wont to delude yourself, but more purposefully. In truth, what else could we do? We needed you, and in order to induce you to accept our terms, we had to establish some goal, some ideal for you to aim at."

Something about the kqyres' voice disturbed Mattern; he only half listened as the hyperspacer continued: "And the resources of your mind were so pitifully meager at that time that this woman was the best we could dredge up. Later, when your horizons had broadened and your perceptions deepened, we attempted to alter your goal to a more worthy one, but the woman had already become an obsession . . ."

"You're not the kqyres," Mattern interrupted. "You have a different voice."

"Not the *same* kqyres," the voice corrected. "Truly, it was unfair to make Lord Njeri go through a thing like this twice in one lifetime. Moreover, as he grew old, he grew careless."

So that was why the men had been drugged. There had been an unscheduled stop in hyperspace.

Mattern got up and looked intently at the shadowy form. The xhind flickered a little, as if in embarrassment, and embarked almost nervously upon an explanation. "You were never intended to attain Lyddy, merely to keep her image before you like the star a mariner follows but can never reach." And then the kqyres laughed. "Except, of course, that today he can reach his star."

"A carrot and a donkey might be a more suitable simile," Mattern said. "Pity you couldn't have provided a better carrot."

The new kqyres ignored this comment. "Lord Njeri was transferred. He has asked me to say that he looks forward to the pleasure of renewing your friendship when you come again to Ferr. Meanwhile, I have taken his place." After some hesitation, the new kqyres added, "I hope we shall be good friends, also."

There was no use pretending any longer. "I know who you are," Mattern said. "I recognize your voice. You're the mbretersha herself, aren't you?"

SHE seemed pleased rather than dismayed. "Yes, I am the mbretersha. I came to realize that the post of kqyres was more difficult than that of queen. Therefore, I was the only one who should rightfully undertake it. As I told you, in our universe a ruler cannot afford pride. She lives only for the good of her people."

"She's got to," Mattern said bluntly, "if, as you said, her nervous system is attuned to theirs.

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What actually did happen is that Njeri told you I was quitting the business and he couldn't control me any more. So you took his place to see if you could change my mind."

"Oh, that was a mere pleasantry!" she said. "I knew you would not give up the hyperspace trade. What else would you have left?"

What else *would* he have left? His money, his collections, his unpleasant memories. All his emotional ties now were with that other universe.

"Who's ruling Ferr?" he asked, evading her question.

"Lord Njeri, your former kqyres, serves as my regent. He is my father, so he is fitted by birth; his system is also attuned to the planet's, although not as sensitively as mine, since he is a male. Perhaps that would make him a better ruler; he will suffer less. And I see no reason otherwise why a male should be deemed incapable of ruling, providing he is under careful supervision."

"No reason at all," Mattern agreed.

"Moreover," she continued, "I have organized the whole government of my planet so that it runs itself. And, of course, from time to time, when we make our trips, I shall be able to check into what's going on."

"But we're not going to make any more trips," he said. Although he had not been serious about retiring — he knew that now — he wasn't going to let the hyperspacers push him around. *Make her sweat a little,* he thought irreverently.

"Will you not give me a chance, Captain?" she asked. "Is the prospect of my company so displeasing to you that it will make you give up the business immediately?"

"You know it's not that. I told the kqyres before you came —"

"But my people won't know it's not that. I shall lose face."

"If only you *had* a face!" he cried. "I'm sick of sailing with shadows!"

"My form in your universe is truly horrible, Mattern," she said softly, "truly monstrous. The xhindi who have seen themselves in mirrors in your universe have often gone mad."

"Anything is better than emptiness," he told her.

"If I appear in my true form, then will you accept me as your kqyres?"

"Well," he said, enjoying himself, "I'll make a few more trips with you, but that's all I'll promise."

"I accept your promises," she said.

He felt a tiny shiver rise up in him. Suppose her normspace form was even more hideous than her hyperspace form, which of course,

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was no longer hideous to him. Would his nerves be strong enough to bear it?

HE held his breath as the vibrations began to slow down, the grays shimmering into substance, taking on all the colors of the rainbow and then flowing into one basic roseate hue. Bit by bit, the planes and shapes began to coalesce into the shape of . . .

A woman. The most beautiful woman he had ever seen. A woman next to whom even the dream of Lyddy paled into thin air.

And, momentarily, he became the Len Mattern of fifteen years back, standing there with his mouth agape. "But you said you'd be a monster . . ."

"To my people, Mattern," she smiled, "this form is as monstrous as ours is to your people. You change into our doubles in hyperspace; we change into yours in normspace. Had you kept the continuity of tradition that we have, you would know what we have always known — that xhind and human are different aspects of the same race. That is why you fear us, and we do not fear you."

Of course, he thought. *How else could they understand us so well? How else could they find logic in our illogic and be able to condition us according to our human natures?* And he smiled to think that all objection to the xhindi from the social angle was invalid. Monsters they might be, but not nonhumans.

"Once I thought this appearance was monstrous, Mattern," the mbretersha went on, in the sweet voice which suited her now, "because I thought you and your kind were, though forms of our race, monstrous forms — not only without beauty, but without dignity or intelligence or compassion."

"Maybe you were right," he said.

"But since I have learned to know you and to — like you, I have come to realize that outward semblances are meaningless. I may appear one way in your universe, another way in mine, but I am the same I. If there is beauty —" and she gave what, in a lesser personage, would have been almost a giggle — "it is an inner beauty."

Mattern could not agree with this premise. Although he had admired the mbretersha on Ferr, he felt quite differently toward her now, and because of no suddenly discovered inner beauty.

"You'll stay this way in this universe then?" he asked. "It makes it so much more comfortable for me — than just a collection of shadows," he added hastily.

"I will stay this way permanently while I am in your universe, Mattern," she told him, "if, in your turn, you will accept me as — as —"

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"As my shipmate," Mattern finished, "my kqyres. I have already done so."

"Not merely as your *ship*mate."

"As my — wife?" he blurted, wondering whether he was reading her mind or whether she was projecting so forcibly into his that he merely spoke her thoughts for her.

She nodded.

To be chained again, after this brief moment of freedom! He wanted her, right enough, and he was delighted to have her for his partner, his companion, but he saw no need for formal commitments between them.

"You're the mbretersha," he protested, "the queen. It wouldn't be right for you to marry a commoner!"

"And you," she retorted, "are one of nature's own noblemen, and, hence, a fitting consort for me. There is no one in either universe whom I could marry without lowering myself," she explained, "so I might as well wed where there is a basis of respect, of admiration, and, to be sure, expediency."

"But — but *our* ceremony wouldn't be valid in *your* universe, would it?" he spluttered wildly. "And *your* ceremony —"

"We will have two ceremonies, Mattern, one in each universe."

This, he could see in alarm, was going to be a truly lasting marriage.

MATTERN was happy with the mbretersha, for she knew how to satisfy a man's every dream as well as his desires, and of course, being the kqyres, she was the only woman who would not be disturbed by the presence of one on board. Moreover, she was a woman for whom a universe could be risked, a woman to whom worlds could be offered — in short, just as he was the only man worthy of her, so she was the only woman worthy of him.

But sometimes he fancied that the mbretersha's blue eyes had the same haunting familiarity that he had seen in Lyddy's and Alard's, and he wondered. Alard's had been explicable enough; he and Mattern had had the same mother. But why should Lyddy also have his mother's eyes — and, stranger still, why should the mbretersha?

Len could not help wondering whether, to create the ideal fantasy, the ultimate carrot, the xhindi had reached far back in his mind to get the earliest — and thus the most fundamental — illusion of beauty for him. Could both Lyddy and the mbretersha have been deliberately modeled on his mother, and was the mbretersha's form in normspace merely whatever she chose it to be — or appear to be?

Oh, well, he thought, *perhaps an artful illusion is the truest form of reality.*

— CHRISTOPHER GRIMM

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LAST OF THE MORTICIANS

By E. C. TUBB

Business was dead, the victim of a mercy killing—what else could they do now but bury it?

Illustrated by JOHNSON

IT was a smoking day in summer and Centre Forks, Pop. 12,057, palpitated in the heat. From above, a plane sent down a fading murmur while, in the valley, a train bored its rustling way toward the west. A few turbocars carrying housewives to their clubs hummed down Main Street and a solitary dog scratched itself listlessly in the shade.

Centre Forks was a quiet town.

"It would be nice," said Ephraim Fingle wistfully, staring at the sky, "if the Businessman's Special would go wrong somehow and crack up on Old Candy."

The Businessman's Special carried 300 commuters and Old Candy was the local mountain.

"It would be better," said Luke Earguard, even more wistfully,

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"if the Silver Streak jumped the rails at Morgan's Crossing."

The Silver Streak carried 3,000 passengers and Morgan's Crossing was five miles closer to Centre Forks than Old Candy.

Both men sighed longingly at the prospect.

Across the street, the doors of Sam's Tavern flapped open and Joe Weston, the town drunk, staggered blearily onto the sidewalk. A car, a blur of red and green, came ghosting down the street as he stepped onto the pavement. Taking a sight on the glaring patch of color which was the public TV screen, Joe weaved his way toward it. Both Ephraim and Luke tensed as the path of the car and the path of the drunk coincided.

"Perhaps?" Ephraim was an optimist.

"No such luck." Luke was a pessimist, and Luke was right.

THE snatch-field, as always, operated with its usual efficiency. The car hummed on. The drunk, picking himself up from where the field had deposited him, staggered wildly for a moment before getting his bearings, then lunged back across the street. The flap of the tavern doors was echoed by Ephraim's sigh of disappointment.

"What this town needs," he said with deep conviction, "is a good, first-class funeral."

"A hearse and fifteen cars," said Luke. "Limousines, big, black and dignified."

"A hand-carved mahogany casket with red silk lining and solid silver hardware."

"Calla lilies," said Luke. "A truckload of tributes and the 'Death March' from *Saul*."

"Not *Saul*," protested Ephraim. "Too depressing."

"Maybe you're right." Luke had his own ideas, but it was too hot to argue with his ex-rival turned partner. He scowled as the dream faded. "The guy I'd like to bury," he said savagely, "is that Ambassador What's-his-name."

"Sigk Gesligk." The name was written on Ephraim's heart. "From Rigel," he added.

"That's the one." Luke's scowl deepened. "For him, I'd supply a split-pine box full of splinters."

"Cut small," agreed Ephraim. "Without lining."

"Galvanized handles and no flowers."

"No embalming and no mutes."

"No mutes, mourners or music."

"Planted in unhallowed ground."

"The bum," said Luke.

Which was rather an odd way to talk about the greatest benefactor the human race had ever known.

PROGRESS is relentless; someone always has to go to the wall, but that someone can't be

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expected to like it. There were compensations, both men admitted that, but they wouldn't have been human if they hadn't, at times, longed for the good old days. When Sigk Gesligk had arrived, bringing with him the secret of immortality, he had dealt a death blow to an honored profession.

The morticians had gone to the wall.

There was still a little work, of course, but it wasn't the same. Ephraim sighed as he recalled their last burial. Mrs. Chadwell's pet dog, a horrible little Peke, had rashly eaten rat poison instead of the boned chicken provided and had passed on with suitable dispatch. The whole town had turned out to witness the ceremony.

But burying a dog, no matter how you looked at it, wasn't the same thing. It lacked a certain dignity, if nothing else, and both Ephraim and Luke were highly conscious of the dignity of their profession.

"It isn't as if we can rely on accidents," Luke had said when they had first discussed the idea of amalgamation. "What with the snatch-fields and other gimmicks to save fools from their folly, accidents just don't happen now."

"Suicide?" Ephraim had mentioned the good old reliable standby.

Luke had shaken his head. "People don't get depressed now," he pointed out. "Not that depressed, anyway. No, the only way is for us to become partners and save expenses. It's that or both go out of business."

But, from the look of it, they had only staved off the inevitable.

The hound finished scratching itself and wandered off to investigate certain trees. Joe Weston, reeling even more now than before, left the tavern and managed to cross the street without further indignity. Slowly, as the heat faded, the town came to life. A group of youngsters wandered past staring, as usual, at the urns, headstones, caskets and wreaths in the parlor window.

Luke shook his head as he listened to their comments.

"Finished," he mourned. "Ended. Even the kids haven't respect for us now."

"Ghouls," Ephraim said wonderingly, and shuddered at the word. "I've never been called that before."

"Ephraim," said Luke, "the profession is dead. Let's face it."

"Maybe not." Ephraim didn't like to admit it. "Maybe it's just a recession. Maybe there'll be a plague or something."

"Not a chance." Luke sounded bitter. "We've hung on to the last, Ephraim, but now we're finished. There's nothing left but for us to sell out and get jobs in a food factory."

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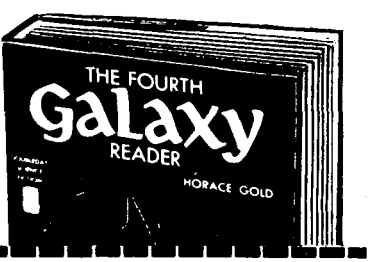

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IT was hard, but it had to be faced; even Ephraim had to agree that waiting for a plague was a forlorn hope. His sigh sounded like a jet liner passing overhead.

"I guess you're right, Luke," he said dispiritedly. "But it's a pity. I'd liked to have had one really first-class funeral before the end." A thought brightened his eye. "Luke!"

"Uh?"

"You said the profession's dead. Right?"

"We're the last of the morticians," said Luke. "When we quit, it'll be the end of the profession."

"Fair enough. But when a thing's dead, what do you do with it?"

"How's that again?"

"You bury it, that's what." Ephraim was triumphant. "Get it? We'll hold one last ceremony, give it the works, and we'll symbolically inter the entire profession." He noticed Luke's expression. "No?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"It's symbolic, sure, but the whole thing will be treated as a joke. You heard those kids. How do you think people will react to us burying an empty casket?"

Ephraim knew the answer to that one.

"They'll laugh themselves sick, that's what." Luke became thoughtful. "But what if the casket wasn't empty? Or if they didn't know it was?"

"What's on your mind?" Ephraim was beginning to regret he'd ever thought of the idea.

"I've got an idea." Luke nodded his head thoughtfully as the details fell into place. "We'll have our funeral, but we'll do it right. As far as anyone will know, there'll be a real body. That means they will treat it with respect, so we won't be laughed at."

"Nice," said Ephraim. He hated to shatter his partner's enthusiasm. "But aren't you forgetting something? How are we going to get a body?"

"Easy." Luke weighed his partner with a professional eye. "We'll pretend that you've passed on. You'll make a nice corpse."

"You'd make a nicer one."

"You're older than I am and better known."

"It was my idea in the first place," argued Ephraim.

"We'll toss for it," said Luke.

Ephraim lost.

AS a funeral, it was a colossal success. Even Ephraim had to admit that. He'd felt a little peeved at Luke having all the fun, but he'd been allowed to choose his own casket and the floral tributes were spectacularly lavish. There had been twenty mutes and ten bearers, the high school band had given fair treatment to the "March" from *Saul,* and everyone who knew him, had

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seen him or who had known someone who had known him had followed the casket in a determined effort to get into the act.

Death was so rare as to create headlines and Luke, by virtue of a third cousin connected with advertising, had done a good job on the publicity. Every hotel in town had been booked solid. Every house with a spare bedroom had coined money. TV had covered the event on a worldwide network and even a delegation of Rigelians, Vegans and other assorted members of the Galactic Civilization had come to see the fun.

Centre Forks had had a field day.

"Fifteen orders," gloated Luke. "From Mrs. Homer's little girl, who wants us to inter her favorite doll, to Fred Easterby, who wants us to plant his appendix. He's got it in a jar for some reason and now he wants it given decent burial."

"Now wait a minute." Ephraim rubbed his sore cheeks. He'd followed the cortage hidden behind false whiskers and he was allergic to the stuff. "Since when have we fallen so low that we've begun burying dolls?"

"Since we got the order." Luke busied himself with pencil and paper. "Now let me see. We've got a plank of walnut that would do for the casket and there's some of that white plush left over—"

HE added figures, doubled the amount, looked at it sidewise and then rounded off the figure. "We'll have to disinter the doll afterward, of course, but I've allowed for that."

"I don't get it," said Ephraim. "That ceremony out there was to symbolically bury the profession. A clean, decent ending to an honored trade. Now you're talking about pandering to a rich kid's whim. I thought we'd quit."

"That was before we got the orders."

"It's not ethical."

"It's money in the bank," reminded Luke.

"Money isn't everything," said Ephraim piously. "I refuse to prostitute my art."

"You've already done that. Remember Mrs. Chadwell's dog?"

"That was a living thing which had passed to its rest," said Ephraim. "Such interments were recognized by the profession before Sigk Gesligk stabbed us in the back. Dolls are different."

"Why?"

"It's mockery, that's why."

"You can't mock what doesn't exist." Luke threw down his pencil and tilted his chair. "Now you tell me—how else can we stay solvent? It's no good waiting for natural business. There isn't any. People don't die any more and, as far as the world goes, we're as extinct as the dodo. While you're

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on the subject, perhaps you'll tell me the difference between interring a doll and burying an empty casket."

"You've changed," said Ephraim sadly. "Success has gone to your head. A few weeks ago, you wouldn't have talked like this. Doesn't tradition mean anything to you?"

"Sure it does," Luke replied easily. "But I like to eat too."

"But we've quit. We're out of business."

"Fifteen orders says different," grinned Luke. "I've changed my mind."

He lost the grin as trouble, unannounced, unsuspected and entirely unwanted, joined the party.

Its name was Augustus Blake and it came directly from the government.

"DISGRACE," said Ephraim. "Trial, sentence, the works. I wish I were dead."

Luke refrained from the obvious comment. If Ephraim were dead, then neither of them would have had to face the prosecution Blake had instigated.

"Conspiring to falsify the public records," groaned Ephraim. "Creating a public mischief by arranging for a fraudulent interment. Acquiring money under false pretenses by the sale of floral tributes. Spreading alarm and despondency by the rumored failure of the immortality treatment. Treasonable conduct in that we created strained relations between the government and the Rigelian Ambassador." He stared hollowly at his partner. "Did we really do all that?"

"The judge said we did." Even the prospect of fifteen interments couldn't cheer Luke up now. He ran a trembling hand through his hair. "The way he talked to us, as if we were criminals! He said he was doing us a favor by imposing a heavy fine instead of sending us to jail."

"Unless we pay up, we'll go there anyway," said Ephraim.

"I know." Luke scowled as the doorbell sent echoes through the house. "More trouble, I'll bet. That or some smart-aleck kid asking after your health. You'd think some people would get tired of beating a corny old joke to death."

He rose and went grumbling to the door. Ephraim, sitting at the table, heard the mumble of voices and the sound of many feet. He looked up as Luke returned. He wasn't alone. A Rigelian was with him, a tall, scaled, humanoid shape carrying the inevitable sound-vision recorder hanging from a strap around its neck.

A tourist, thought Ephraim sourly.

"Meet Gel Rangk," Luke introduced. "Mr. Rangk, this is the famous Ephraim Fingle of whom you may have heard."

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"I attended your most interesting trial," hissed the Rigelian. He spoke English as if he had a steam engine instead of vocal cords. "Very interesting example of primitive operation of arbitrary justice." He touched the box hanging around his neck. "Have full record for later editing and dissemination to those interested in purchasing copies of same."

"How nice for you." Ephraim couldn't forget that it was this race which had reduced him to his present position.

"Regret exceedingly that I missed opportunity of recording the ceremony which was the cause of your unfortunate predicament," continued the Rigelian. "Such record would be highly salable to those with interest in quaint burial customs of primitive planets. Is ceremony repeatable?"

"No," said Ephraim.

"Perhaps," said Luke.

"No," repeated Ephraim. "Not on your life."

"Will pay," said Gel Rangk.

Ephraim changed his mind.

IT was a chilling day in late fall, and Centre Forks, Pop. 17,106, was about to enter the last performance of the season. Ephraim Fingle, resplendent in full mourning dress, ran a critical eye over the assembled mutes, bearers, mourners and band. Luke joined him just before deadline. He had a Miami tan and glowed with prosperity. He raised his eyebrows at the casket.

"What's it this time?" he inquired briskly.

"Granny Hilton's bedroom slippers. She won the raffle. She was about to discard them anyway, so she said they'd earned a decent burial."

"They'll do as well as anything." Luke scowled at one of the mutes. "Get that grin off your face. You're paid to look like one of the bereaved, not a clown." He lost his scowl as the band swung into the "Death March" from *Saul*.

Ephraim looked self-conscious. "They like it," he explained. "Riding in the hearse?"

"Why not?" Luke climbed aboard, Ephraim at his side, and both men smoothed their faces as the procession swung into Main Street between the lines of ranked aliens and their busily whirring recorders.

— E. C. TUBB

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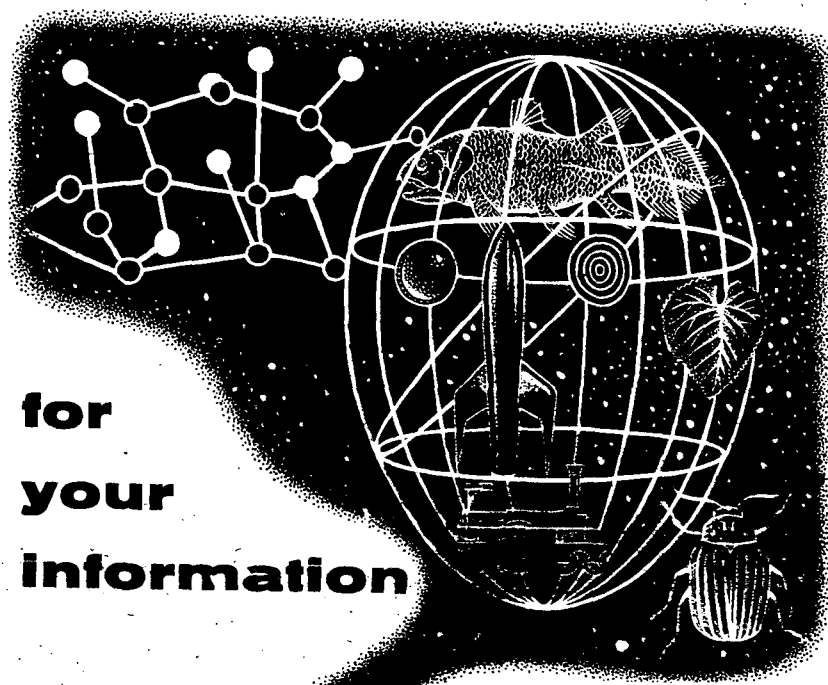
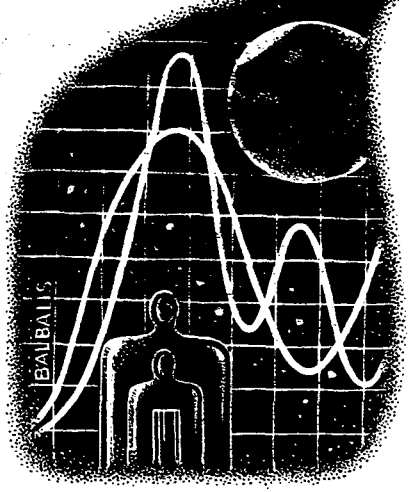


for your information

BY WILLY LEY



THE ACCIDENT THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN

SOME time ago I came across a very interesting document, interesting for more than one reason. In physical shape, it is a typescript of an article, only three and a half pages long, written about 1910. It must have been printed somewhere, because on the first page there are some penciled notes as to type size and so forth, but I don't know where it was published. The last page bears the author's signature: Hudson Maxim.

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Before I go on, I had better explain just who Hudson Maxim was. The mention of the name of Maxim brings to mind the Maxim gun, but its inventor was Sir Hiram Stevens Maxim, who died in 1916. If the name made you think of the Maxim silencer, you were one generation closer to the present, for the silencer was invented by Sir Hiram's son, Hiram Percy Maxim, who died in 1936. The Hudson Maxim who wrote the article I am going to discuss was Sir Hiram's younger brother (died in 1927) who founded the Columbia Powder Company and then the Maxim Powder Company — finally sold to E. I. Dupont de Nemours — and invented the explosive called maximite.

Having the "who's who" straightened out, we can proceed to the piece itself. It opens with the following sentence: "The enormous energy developed by the combustion of high explosives and smokeless powders has led many to conclude that such materials could be utilized to advantage in some form of internal combustion engine especially designed for the purpose."

This sounds like a fairly innocuous beginning, and when I read it, I felt sure what the argument in the next paragraph would be. To my surprise, the argument I expected was not developed. Hudson Maxim, a few lines later, pointed out that a "smokeless powder combines within itself both the fuel and the oxygen for its own combustion; hence, it is a fuel in which the combustible is chemically combined with oxygen, and is consequently a much more expensive fuel than gasoline or anything now used in internal combustion engines." The line of reasoning is this: "The oxygen contained in an explosive cannot be compared in cheapness with atmospheric oxygen, which does not cost anything."

All true, of course, but I would have expected that one of the foremost authorities on high explosives would have pointed out something different. The main argument is that a smokeless powder or a high explosive does *not* contain more energy than ordinary engine fuels. Most likely this simply had not yet been measured in 1910, strange as it may seem in retrospect.

FOR a good comparison of the energy content of various fuels, the exhaust velocity (theoretical) when used in a rocket is a fine yardstick. Now if you compare these theoretical exhaust velocities, you get the following somewhat unexpected list:

Dynamite (if it could be used in a rocket motor) has a theoretical exhaust velocity of almost precisely 11,000 feet per second. Smokeless powder, such as used in artillery cartridges, produces a theoretical exhaust velocity of

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10,500 feet per second. Ordinary ethyl alcohol, burned with pure oxygen, has a theoretical exhaust velocity of around 13,700 feet per second. Gasoline, burned with pure oxygen, has one of about 14,500 feet per second, and even aniline burned with nitric acid proves superior to dynamite, with a theoretical exhaust velocity of 11,800 feet per second.

Hudson Maxim, instead of refuting the widespread misunderstanding that "dynamite is more powerful than anything," was talking in terms of money. It would be too expensive to run a car or an airplane on smokeless powder is his main talking point.

He emphasized that he was not just calculating costs. "I have conducted more experiments in the use of explosive materials for driving motors than any man living or dead. I have spent more than sixty thousand dollars in these experiments."

His purpose in making all these experiments and in spending all that money was to find a superior system of propulsion for naval torpedoes and, possibly, small torpedo boats. He pointed out that a naval torpedo is in itself an expensive item (the price he quoted was $5,000) and that its purpose is to destroy an even more expensive enemy vessel. "It therefore matters little whether or not the propelling means or motive fluid for the run costs fifty dollars instead of five dollars; but it would make a lot of difference in the economy of running an automobile or an aeroplane."

The main surprise came when I learned in which way Hudson Maxim used his high explosive for driving a naval torpedo. I had best stick to straight quotation now:

"In my system of driving torpedoes, I employ a material called motorite, consisting of seventy per cent nitro-glycerin and thirty per cent guncotton. In the form in which it is used it is no longer explosive, but burns continuously without explosion.

"Bars of the material seven inches in diameter and five feet long are forced into steel tubes. These tubes are closed at one end and the other end screws into a combustion chamber. Water is forced into the combustion chamber instantly upon ignition of the exposed end of the motorite in the combustion chamber.

"Under three hundred pounds pressure to the square inch, motorite burns at the rate of a foot per minute. The flame blast of the burning motorite atomizes the water by passing with the water through a tube in which baffle plates are placed at intervals. The products of combustion and steam together are utilized to drive a turbine or reciprocating engine, preferably a turbine . . . A pound of

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motorite will evaporate about two pounds of water, so that each pound of motorite consumed represents three pounds of mixed steam and products of combustion."

I KNOW, of course, what this suggests. If you have a bar of a double-base powder, 7 inches in diameter and 5 feet long, you don't use it to boil water to get steam to drive a turbine, which then drives a propeller. You take your bar of double-base powder and suspend it inside a tube in such a manner that it burns as rapidly as possible and you have a nice solid-fuel missile of reasonable size.

Reading the description of the utilization — provided that's the word to use at this point—of motorite strikes one as a very close miss. One little accident of the right kind would have opened his eyes. The miss is even closer when you read the concluding paragraph, which starts out thus: "I once suggested the use of motorite in small sticks for driving model aeroplanes in short trial flights. For such use the material would be cheap enough . . ."

I can't resist quoting one more paragraph from the article:

"The cost of driving an engine by means of motorite would be about two dollars per horsepower hour. Therefore, in order to drive a hundred horsepower automobile with motorite it would cost, for fuel alone, two hundred dollars an hour, and the motorite would make a heavy load for the car, as it would require the consumption of nearly a ton of motorite per hour. Therefore, if a hundred horsepower aeroplane were to use motorite for a fuel, it would be unable to carry enough for an hour's flight."

When Hudson Maxim died in 1927, he was 74 years old. Conceivably he could have lived for another twenty years. If he had, he would have seen what he missed back in 1910, just because of the accident that didn't happen — and that would have changed history if it had.

THE MYSTERY PLANT FROM KYRENE

ONCE upon a time there was a plant which Greek-speaking traders called Zilphion. To quiet objections or questions which Basil Davenport or Rosel George Brown are likely to raise at this point, I have to explain that the first letter, if you write it in the Greek original, is a sigma, which is normally transcribed as an "s" rather than a "z." But all my teachers were in unanimous agreement that the pronunciation of the Greek sigma was that of the English "z," so why not use it?

Well, to go on, if you should happen to have a hoard of old coins and among them is one of the two

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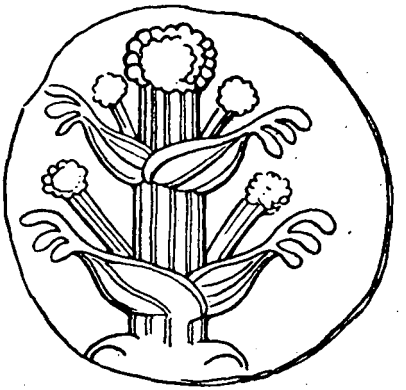
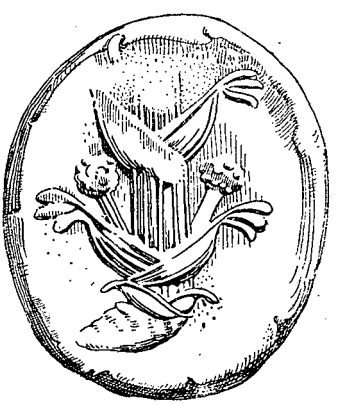


Two different Didrachmai pieces from classical Cyrene, showing the unknown plant Zylphion. The actual size of these coins is about the same as a quarter.



didrachmai pieces from Kyrene (or Cyrene) pictured here, you not only have a valuable collector's item, but also a botanical mystery on your hands. For this zilphion plant is the only example of a plant which became extinct within historical times that I know of.

Of animals which became extinct in historical times, we have a deplorably long list, ranging from a case like *Rhytina (gigas) stelleri,* or Steller's seacow, of which only a few hundred specimens existed when it was discovered, to *Ectopistes migratorius,* the passenger pigeon which in Audubon's times flew over the North American continent in uncountable millions. But nobody ever heard of a plant that flourished in the days of the early civilizations and is now completely unknown — with the exception of this zilphion.

What makes the mystery so astonishing is that zilphion was an article of trade that made several cities rich. The fact alone that it was put on coins indicates that it was valuable, and there existed an idiomatic phrase meaning "more valuable than zilphion." We even have a classical picture of the zilphion trade. It is a shallow bowl made around 600 B.C. and found in Italy. Because the main figure in the picture is the ruler Arkesilas III, the bowl is known as the Arkesilas bowl to historians.

The picture shows the king seated under a sun sail, aboard a ship, surrounded by servants who are all carefully labeled. In the ship's bottom, two men stow large bags under the supervision of somebody labeled *phylakos* (overseer), while five men are on deck with the ruler. One is labeled *eirmo-*

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phoros (porter), another *isophortos* (in this context, this term is best translated as supervisor) and a third one *zilphiomapsos,* the "zilphion-kneader." And somewhere on the bowl is the exclamation *oryxon* ("Go away!") for reasons unknown to me or anybody else.

As the picture on the oval didrachma shows, the plant had a thick and probably creeping root and a thick stem. Both the Greeks and the Romans liked the young zilphion sprouts as a vegetable, and the stem was eaten too. The taste must have been quite pronounced, because zilphion was used to flavor other dishes. The sap of the stem and the root was condensed into a kind of syrup which had a special Latin name (*laserpitium*) and an easy-to-remember value: If you wanted a pound of laserpitium, you handed over a pound of silver coins.

ZILPHION came from North Africa and the people who grew rich ferrying it across the Mediterranean Sea claimed that it could not be cultivated. It grew in certain places in the interior and had to be gathered when in season. Pliny the Elder, in Book V, Chapter 5, of his *Natural History,* stated that "The territory of Cyrene, to a distance of fifteen miles from the shore, is said to abound in trees, while for the same distance beyond that district it is only suitable for the production of grain: after which a tract of land, thirty miles in breadth and 250 miles in length, is productive of nothing but laser (zilphion)."

Pliny's statement clearly implies that the plant grew wild and was not cultivated. But it was in Pliny's time that zilphion began to disappear. "The zilphion of Cyrene no longer exists," Pliny stated in Book XXII, chapter 48. But he went on to tell that some came from Syria. Interestingly enough, Pliny speaks about zilphion only as a medicinal plant. Repeated fumigations with the dried root made hemorrhoids disappear. The mashed root, with wine and oil, was good for bruises "and with wax for the cure of scrofulous sores." The leaves, taken with aromatic white wine immediately after a bath, helped women with a dead fetus clear out the uterus — but the concoction was taken internally, in case one wonders how it was supposed to work.

Three centuries after Pliny, the plant zilphion was unknown.

Anybody who wanted to could — and can even now — read the descriptions of the plant as given by Theophrastus, Dioscorides, Columella and other classical writers. It does not help much, even though the descriptions and the pictures on the coins agree nicely. Early in the nineteenth century, French botanists thought that zilphion was

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probably the plant listed as *Thapsia garganica*, but the German pharmacologist Schroff showed as long ago as 1862 that the classical authors mentioned had described that plant separately. Obviously it was not the same as zilphion.

Another guess was that zilphion might have been a local name for the plant *Ferula asafoetida*. But that one, as its scientific name indicates, has an unpleasant smell, and nobody in his right mind would use it as a flavoring. Besides, it did not grow in North Africa but farther East, mainly in Persia.

Difficult as it is, we have to accept zilphion as extinct. And we'll never know just what kind of vegetable it made on the tables of well-to-do Greeks of antiquity.

JOHANN GUTENBERG'S (OR PETER SCHOEFFER'S) SECRET

EVERYBODY knows the name of Johann Gutenberg, of course — he is the "inventor of printing." The number of people who know the name of Peter Schoeffer is smaller, but those who do know of him know that he was one of the earliest printers and an associate of Johann Gutenberg and Johann Fust.

What I did not know until I came across a reference quite recently is that these three shared a secret which they never divulged to anybody. And it was a vital secret that greatly influenced the new art of printing.

The story of the invention itself is reasonably simple. The "inventor" (I still have to use quotation marks for a short time to come) of printing was born in or about 1400 in the German city of Mainz. His real name was Johann Gensfleisch, which in German unfortunately means "roast goose." Understandably, Johann took his mother's maiden name, Gutenberg. Now the fact is that there was printing of some kind before Gutenberg; his real invention consisted in having movable separate letters that could be put together in any manner desired. He began to experiment with his idea around 1439, and some seven years later he moved back to his native city and settled there to exploit his invention.

Being short of money, Gutenberg had to form a partnership with the goldsmith Johann Fust. Peter Schoeffer somehow joined the partnership and they went to work. The printing press was one problem that was not too hard to solve, for presses of various types existed. Next came the question of making the type. Peter Schoeffer suggested casting it instead of cutting the type by hand. He seems to have been the one to make copper forms for casting.

So far, so good, but what metal

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was to be used for the type? Tin was likely to break under pressure. Lead was too soft. They tried a mixture of tin and lead, which looked all right at first glance, it being neither too brittle nor too soft — under ordinary circumstances. In the press, though, it still had the tendency to be squashed. It lasted for a few impressions, but not long enough.

Then one of the three thought of a "secret ingredient," just as soap manufacturers and toothpaste makers still do. Peter Schoeffer later claimed loud and often that he had been the man who thought of the ingredient, and that it was his idea that made printing possible at all.

But he never said what the ingredient was.

IT was Professor Edmund O. von Lippmann who, about thirty years ago, could show that the secret ingredient must have been bismuth.

It is impossible to say just when bismuth became known. Professor von Lippmann could show that all the suspected mentions of bismuth prior to 1400 A.D. referred to other things. On the other hand, miners must have come across bismuth before that time. But even much later, the miners were not convinced that bismuth was a metal in its own right.

As late as the early seventeenth century, most miners were convinced that there were three kinds of lead (no, they did not think in terms of isotopes as we are likely to do nowadays), namely lead and the metal called *stannum* (tin) and *Wismat* ("white matter," our bismuth). The miners also thought that tin was a little more similar to silver than lead, and that bismuth was even closer to silver. It is reported that miners sometimes, when they found bismuth, complained that they had come too early; if they had come a century or two later, they would have found silver instead. Often, however, they had the consolation that silver could be found below the bismuth, and for that reason bismuth was called *tectum argenti* or "roof of silver."

Well, whether the miners thought bismuth was a kind of lead or not, the fact is that nobody was interested in bismuth prior to about 1450 and that there was a demand for it afterward. Professor von Lippmann was convinced that Schoeffer's secret ingredient was bismuth. In the first place, it would do what was needed: make the type metal harder. In the second place, at a somewhat later date (1495), the German printer Huerus, who was one of the first printers in Spain, had a German merchant send him "77 pounds of Wismat" for which he could not possibly have any use except as

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an additive to the lead and tin in his type metal.

Moreover, Peter Schoeffer did not even have to experiment at random to get the idea that bismuth might do what the first printers needed. In those days, many utensils were made of tin: tin spoons, tin cups, tin plates. The tin casters knew that "Wismat" improved their wares, making them harder and more shiny. In all probability the tin casters had found this out by accident, by using tin which contained bismuth. The fact is that at a somewhat later date they added bismuth on purpose, but their demand for the metal was minor, since the bismuth addition to the tin amounted to only about three per cent.

Peter Schoeffer might easily have known that a small addition of the otherwise rather useless metal made tin wares harder, and might have tried to mix the lead for his type metal with this "hard tin." The addition of bismuth must have been Gutenberg's and Schoeffer's secret. Since none of the original type survived, we naturally cannot analyze it. But before the invention of printing, nobody cared about bismuth, whereas after the invention of printing there was a sudden demand for it.

And miners started looking for *tectum argenti*, even though they themselves would have preferred to find silver directly.

ANY QUESTIONS?

MY piece about the Atlantic Missile Range in the April 1959 GALAXY brought some correspondence which was united on one point. And that point was: "What other rocket ranges are there?" The phrasing of that question was somewhat different in different letters, of course; some readers specifically wanted to know about the Russian rocket ranges, while others asked whether anybody but the United States and Russia had such firing ranges.

Well, let me give as complete an answer as is possible at this moment. First, however, I have to point out that I am going to talk about missile and rocket ranges, as distinct from missile sites. I do not know how many missile sites we have in the United States and I certainly do not know how many the Russians have.

As for the rocket ranges, I would say that there are four major ones in the United States. There is the White Sands Proving Ground, which was the first. Then the Atlantic Missile Range in Florida. Then there is Wallops' Island off Virginia, which is less well known to the public because none of the spectacular big missiles is fired from there. Wallops' Island specializes in scientific experiments, all of them very valuable scientifically, but often of such a nature that it would take a whole article

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just to explain why this particular experiment was made, and why it was made in that specific fashion. The fourth range in the United States is Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, part of which is known to many former GIs as Camp Cooke.

It is fairly easy to outline the distinguishing features of each. Wallops' Island, as stated, specializes in scientific experiments using comparatively small rockets, almost exclusively solid-fuel jobs. White Sands fires military missiles smaller than Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles. The Atlantic Missile Range fires anything experimental which needs exceptionally careful tracking. And Vandenberg AFB in California is for the training of missile troops.

As is usual, even the nicest planning runs into a snag of some kind where an exception has to be made. All satellite shots should go to Cape Canaveral, and they do — unless the satellite is to be placed into an orbit that goes over both poles. That can't be done from Florida. From Canaveral you shoot over the Bahamas, which means to the southeast. If you are willing and able to sacrifice some tracking, you can also shoot northeast. But you can't shoot due south or due north. If you tried to shoot north, the first stage might fall unpleasantly close to Savannah, Georgia. If you tried to shoot due south, you might get a first stage impact near Matanzas, Cuba.

From California, you also cannot shoot due north because there are too many cities in that direction. But if you shoot due south, the next land under the rocket will be Antarctica. Hence polar orbit shots have to be fired from Vandenberg, which normally specializes in troop training.

Now we get to rocket ranges elsewhere in the world.

ONE of the oldest is the Australian range, with its firing site in South Central Australia. If you look at a map of Australia, you see, somewhat off center of the south shore, a deep inlet called Spencer's Gulf, at the head of which is Port Augusta. To the north of Port Augusta, not shown on most maps, is a mountain range called the Woomera Mountains. Woomera is the firing site, and the missiles fly to the northwest across uninhabited deserts. The distance to the shore from Woomera is around 1200 miles.

But in the same direction, if you continue for another 1500 miles, there is a British-owned place named Christmas Island. The Woomera range, therefore, permits shots up to about 2700 miles. The drawback is that the largest firing range of the British Empire is 12,000 miles from Great Britain. For this reason, they have a few

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small firing ranges for small rockets "at home" — one at Aberporth in Wales, and one at Solway Firth in Scotland, with one more, utilizing the Hebrides Islands, under construction.

The French also have a potential large firing range, much closer to their homeland than the English have. This is in the Algerian Sahara at Colomb-Béchar, while the intended target area is Lake Chad, about 1500 miles away.

Germany does not seem to have an active firing range, unless there is something we don't know about. The first rocket firing range of all was the German army's Peenemünde establishment on the island of Usedom, north of the city and harbor of Stettin. They fired in a generally easterly direction, along the shoreline of the Baltic Sea. In the course of the war, Peenemünde was heavily battered, and when the Russians finally took it after prolonged artillery preparation, they claimed that it was three-quarters destroyed. Then, they said, they dynamited what was still standing.

That area is now Polish. And the rumors say that the Russians have reactivated Peenemünde. I can't quite believe that myself, but the stories persist. However, if they fired anything of any size from Peenemünde, it would surely have been detected. So let us leave Peenemünde open as a doubtful case, even though I personally am not convinced.

PROCEEDING to the Russian rocket ranges, there is one we know about. It is Kapustin Yar, almost precisely fifty miles due east of Stalingrad and north of the Caspian Sea. Kapustin Yar was started in 1946, as far as we know. I am phrasing this carefully because we don't know where the Russians carried on their rocket experiments before World War II. In 1936, remember, they had the high-altitude record for rockets with a shot to about six miles, when nobody else had yet reached two miles. This shot may have been made from Kapustin Yar.

At any event, they can shoot in any direction, except to the west, from Kapustin Yar. There are deserts to the north and to the east, and the Caspian Sea to the south. In fact, it was thought at first that both Sputnik I and Sputnik II were fired from Kapustin Yar, but a Japanese astronomer, carefully going over the orbits of the first two artificial satellites, decided that Kapustin Yar had about the right latitude for these shots, but not the right longitude. He came to the conclusion that there had to be another Russian firing range farther east, in the Kyzyl Kum Desert.

And that is as far as our knowledge goes right now.

— WILLY LEY

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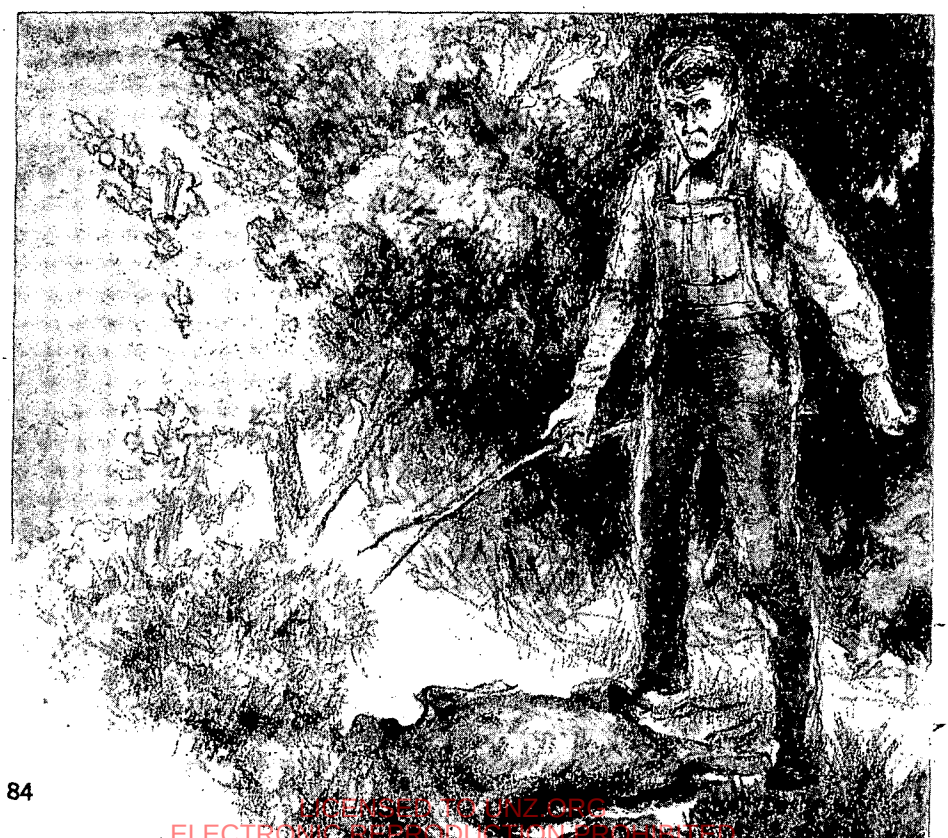
A death in

Human or not, it made no difference — only a heartless person could refuse help to a lost, hurt thing because it had no heart!



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the house

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

OLD Mose Abrams was out hunting cows when he found the alien. He didn't know it was an alien, but it was alive and it was in a lot of trouble and Old Mose, despite everything the neighbors said about him, was not the kind of man who could bear to leave a sick thing out there in the woods.

It was a horrid-looking thing, green and shiny, with some purple spots on it, and it was repulsive even twenty feet away. And it stank.

It had crawled, or tried to crawl, into a clump of hazel brush, but hadn't made it. The head part was in the brush and the rest lay out there naked in the open. Every now and then the parts that seemed to be arms and hands clawed feebly at the ground, trying to force itself deeper in the brush, but it was too weak; it never moved an inch.

It was groaning, too, but not too loud — just the kind of keening sound a lonesome wind might make around a wide, deep eave. But there was more in it than just the sound of winter wind; there was a frightened, desperate note that made the hair stand up on Old Mose's nape.

Old Mose stood there for quite a spell, making up his mind what he ought to do about it, and a while longer after that working up his courage, although most folks offhand would have said that he

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had plenty. But this was the sort of situation that took more than just ordinary screwed-up courage. It took a lot of foolhardiness.

But this was a wild, hurt thing and he couldn't leave it there, so he walked up to it and knelt down, and it was pretty hard to look at, though there was a sort of fascination in its repulsiveness that was hard to figure out — as if it were so horrible that it dragged one to it. And it stank in a way that no one had ever smelled before.

Mose, however, was not finicky. In the neighborhood, he was not well known for fastidity. Ever since his wife had died almost ten years before, he had lived alone on his untidy farm and the housekeeping that he did was the scandal of all the neighbor women. Once a year, if he got around to it, he sort of shoveled out the house, but the rest of the year he just let things accumulate.

So he wasn't as upset as some might have been with the way the creature smelled. But the sight of it upset him, and it took him quite a while before he could bring himself to touch it, and when he finally did, he was considerably surprised. He had been prepared for it to be either cold or slimy, or maybe even both. But it was neither. It was warm and hard and it had a clean feel to it, and he was reminded of the way a green corn stalk would feel.

HE slid his hand beneath the hurt thing and pulled it gently from the clump of hazel brush and turned it over so he could see its face. It hadn't any face. It had an enlargement at the top of it, like a flower on top of a stalk, although its body wasn't any stalk, and there was a fringe around this enlargement that wiggled like a can of worms, and it was then that Mose almost turned around and ran.

But he stuck it out.

He squatted there, staring at the no-face with the fringe of worms, and he got cold all over and his stomach doubled up on him and he was stiff with fright — and the fright got worse when it seemed to him that the keening of the thing was coming from the worms.

Mose was a stubborn man. One had to be stubborn to run a runty farm like his. Stubborn and insensitive in a lot of ways. But not insensitive, of course, to a thing in pain.

Finally he was able to pick it up and hold it in his arms and there was nothing to it, for it didn't weigh much. Less than a half-grown shoat, he figured.

He went up the woods path with it, heading back for home, and it seemed to him the smell of it was less. He was hardly scared at all and he was warm again and not cold all over.

For the thing was quieter now and keening just a little. And al-

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though he could not be sure of it, there were times when it seemed as if the thing were snuggling up to him, the way a scared and hungry baby will snuggle to any grown person that comes and picks it up.

Old Mose reached the buildings and he stood out in the yard a minute, wondering whether he should take it to the barn or house. The barn, of course, was the natural place for it, for it wasn't human — it wasn't even as close to human as a dog or cat or sick lamb would be.

He didn't hesitate too long, however. He took it into the house and laid it on what he called a bed, next to the kitchen stove. He got it straightened out all neat and orderly and pulled a dirty blanket over it, and then went to the stove and stirred up the fire until there was some flame.

Then he pulled up a chair beside the bed and had a good, hard, wondering look at this thing he had brought home. It had quieted down a lot and seemed more comfortable than it had out in the woods. He tucked the blanket snug around it with a tenderness that surprised himself. He wondered what he had that it might eat, and even if he knew, how he'd manage feeding it, for it seemed to have no mouth.

"But you don't need to worry none," he told it. "Now that I got you under a roof, you'll be all right. I don't know too much about it, but I'll take care of you the best I can."

By now it was getting on toward evening, and he looked out the window and saw that the cows he had been hunting had come home by themselves.

"I got to go get the milking done and the other chores," he told the thing lying on the bed, "but it won't take me long. I'll be right back."

OLD Mose loaded up the stove so the kitchen would stay warm and he tucked the thing in once again, then got his milk pails and went down to the barn.

He fed the sheep and pigs and horses and he milked the cows. He hunted eggs and shut the chicken house. He pumped a tank of water.

Then he went back to the house.

It was dark now and he lit the oil lamp on the table, for he was against electricity. He'd refused to sign up when REA had run out the line and a lot of the neighbors had gotten sore at him for being uncooperative. Not that he cared, of course.

He had a look at the thing upon the bed. It didn't seem to be any better, or any worse, for that matter. If it had been a sick lamb or an ailing calf, he could have known right off how it was getting on, but this thing was different. There was no way to tell.

He fixed himself some supper and ate it and wished he knew how to feed the thing. And he wished,

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too, that he knew how to help it. He'd got it under shelter and he had it warm, but was that right or wrong for something like this? He had no idea.

He wondered if he should try to get some help, then felt squeamish about asking help when he couldn't say exactly what had to be helped. But then he wondered how he would feel himself if he were in a far, strange country, all played out and sick, and no one to get him any help because they didn't know exactly what he was.

That made up his mind for him and he walked over to the phone. But should be call a doctor or a veterinarian? He decided to call the doctor because the thing was in the house. If it had been in the barn, he would have called the veterinarian.

He was on a rural line and the hearing wasn't good and he was halfway deaf, so he didn't use the phone too often. He had told himself at times it was nothing but another aggravation and there had been a dozen times he had threatened to have it taken out. But now he was glad he hadn't.

The operator got old Doctor Benson and they couldn't hear one another too well, but Mose finally made the doctor understand who was calling and that he needed him and the doctor said he'd come.

With some relief, Mose hung up the phone and was just standing there, not doing anything, when he was struck by the thought that there might be others of these things down there in the woods. He had no idea what they were or what they might be doing or where they might be going, but it was pretty evident that the one upon the bed was some sort of stranger from a very distant place. It stood to reason that there might be more than one of them, for far traveling was a lonely business and anyone —or anything—would like to have some company along.

HE got the lantern down off the peg and lit it and went stumping out the door. The night was as black as a stack of cats and the lantern light was feeble, but that made not a bit of difference, for Mose knew this farm of his like the back of his hand.

He went down the path into the woods. It was a spooky place, but it took more than woods at night to spook Old Mose. At the place where he had found the thing, he looked around, pushing through the brush and holding the lantern high so he could see a bigger area, but he didn't find another one of them.

He did find something else, though — a sort of outsize birdcage made of metal lattice work that had wrapped itself around an eight-inch hickory tree. He tried to pull it loose, but it was jammed so tight that he couldn't budge it.

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He sighted back the way it must have come. He could see where it had plowed its way through the upper branches of the trees, and out beyond were stars, shining bleakly with the look of far away.

Mose had no doubt that the thing lying on his bed beside the kitchen stove had come in this birdcage contraption. He marveled some at that, but he didn't fret himself too much, for the whole thing was so unearthly that he knew he had little chance of pondering it out.

He walked back to the house and he scarcely had the lantern blown out and hung back on its peg than he heard a car drive up.

The doctor, when he came up to the door, became a little grumpy at seeing Old Mose standing there.

"You don't look sick to me," the doctor said. "Not sick enough to drag me clear out here at night."

"I ain't sick," said Mose.

"Well, then," said the doctor, more grumpily than ever, "what did you mean by phoning me?"

"I got someone who is sick," said Mose. "I hope you can help him. I would have tried myself, but I don't know how to go about it."

The doctor came inside and Mose shut the door behind him.

"You got something rotten in here?" asked the doctor.

"No, it's just the way he smells. It was pretty bad at first, but I'm getting used to it by now."

The doctor saw the thing lying on the bed and went over to it. Old Mose heard him sort of gasp and could see him standing there, very stiff and straight. Then he bent down and had a good look at the critter on the bed.

When he straightened up and turned around to Mose, the only thing that kept him from being downright angry was that he was so flabbergasted.

"Mose," he yelled, "what *is* this?"

"I don't know," said Mose. "I found it in the woods and it was hurt and wailing and I couldn't leave it there."

"You think it's sick?"

"I know it is," said Mose. "It needs help awful bad. I'm afraid it's dying."

THE doctor turned back to the bed again and pulled the blanket down, then went and got the lamp so that he could see. He looked the critter up and down, and he prodded it with a skittish finger, and he made the kind of mysterious clucking sound that only doctors make.

Then he pulled the blanket back over it again and took the lamp back to the table.

"Mose," he said, "I can't do a thing for it."

"But you're a doctor!"

"A human doctor, Mose. I don't know what this thing is, but it isn't human. I couldn't even guess what

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is wrong with it, if anything. And I wouldn't know what could be safely done for it even if I could diagnose its illness. I'm not even sure it's an animal. There are a lot of things about it that argue it's a plant."

Then the doctor asked Mose straight out how he came to find it and Mose told him exactly how it happened. But he didn't tell him anything about the birdcage, for when he thought about it, it sounded so fantastic that he couldn't bring himself to tell it. Just finding the critter and having it here was bad enough, without throwing in the birdcage.

"I tell you what," the doctor said. "You got something here that's outside all human knowledge. I doubt there's ever been a thing like this seen on Earth before. I have no idea what it is and I wouldn't try to guess. If I were you, I'd get in touch with the university up at Madison. There might be someone there who could get it figured out. Even if they couldn't they'd be interested. They'd want to study it."

Mose went to the cupboard and got the cigar box almost full of silver dollars and paid the doctor. The doctor put the dollars in his pocket, joshing Mose about his eccentricity.

But Mose was stubborn about his silver dollars. "Paper money don't seem legal, somehow," he declared. "I like the feel of silver and the way it clinks. It's got authority."

The doctor left and he didn't seem as upset as Mose had been afraid he might be. As soon as he was gone, Mose pulled up a chair and sat down beside the bed.

It wasn't right, he thought, that the thing should be so sick and no one to help — no one who knew any way to help it.

He sat in the chair and listened to the ticking of the clock, loud in the kitchen silence, and the crackling of the wood burning in the stove.

Looking at the thing lying on the bed, he had an almost fierce hope that it could get well again and stay with him. Now that its birdcage was all banged up, maybe there'd be nothing it could do but stay. And he hoped it would, for already the house felt less lonely.

SITTING in the chair between the stove and bed, Mose realized how lonely it had been. It had not been quite so bad until Towser died. He had tried to bring himself to get another dog, but he never had been able to. For there was no dog that would take the place of Towser and it had seemed unfaithful to even try. He could have gotten a cat, of course, but that would remind him too much of Molly; she had been very fond of cats, and until the time she died, there had always been two or three

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of them underfoot around the place.

But now he was alone. Alone with his farm and his stubbornness and his silver dollars. The doctor thought, like all the rest of them, that the only silver Mose had was in the cigar box in the cupboard. There wasn't one of them who knew about the old iron kettle piled plumb full of them, hidden underneath the floor boards of the living room. He chuckled at the thought of how he had them fooled. He'd give a lot to see his neighbors' faces if they could only know. But he was not the one to tell them. If they were to find it out, they'd have to find it out themselves.

He nodded in the chair and finally he slept, sitting upright, with his chin resting on his chest and his crossed arms wrapped around himself as if to keep him warm.

When he woke, in the dark before the dawn, with the lamp flickering on the table and the fire in the stove burned low, the alien had died.

There was no doubt of death. The thing was cold and rigid and the husk that was its body was rough and drying out — as a corn stalk in the field dries out, whipping in the wind once the growing had been ended.

Mose pulled the blanket up to cover it, and although this was early to do the chores, he went out by lantern light and got them done.

After breakfast, he heated water and washed his face and shaved, and it was the first time in years he'd shaved any day but Sunday. Then he put on his one good suit and slicked down his hair and got the old jalopy out of the machine shed and drove into town.

He hunted up Eb Dennison, the town clerk, who also was the secretary of the cemetery association.

"Eb," he said, "I want to buy a lot."

"But you've got a lot," protested Eb.

"That plot," said Mose, "is a family plot. There's just room for me and Molly."

"Well, then," asked Eb, "why another one? You have no other members of the family."

"I found someone in the woods," said Mose. "I took him home and he died last night. I plan to bury him."

"If you found a dead man in the woods," Eb warned him, "you better notify the coroner and sheriff."

"In time I may," said Mose, not intending to. "Now how about that plot?"

Washing his hands of the affair entirely, Eb sold him the plot.

HAVING bought his plot, Mose went to the undertaking establishment run by Albert Jones.

"Al," he said, "there's been a death out at the house. A stranger

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I found out in the woods. He doesn't seem to have anyone and I aim to take care of it."

"You got a death certificate?" asked Al, who subscribed to none of the niceties affected by most funeral parlor operators.

"Well, no, I haven't."

"Was there a doctor in attendance?"

"Doc Benson came out last night."

"He should have made you out one. I'll give him a ring."

He phoned Doctor Benson and talked with him a while and got red around the gills. He finally slammed down the phone and turned on Mose.

"I don't know what you're trying to pull off," he fumed, "but Doc tells me this thing of yours isn't even human. I don't take care of dogs or cats or —"

"This ain't no dog or cat."

"I don't care what it is. It's got to be human for me to handle it. And don't go trying to bury it in the cemetery, because it's against the law."

Considerably discouraged, Mose left the undertaking parlor and trudged slowly up the hill toward the town's one and only church.

He found the minister in his study working on a sermon. Mose sat down in a chair and fumbled his battered hat around and around in his work-scarred hands.

"Parson," he said, "I'll tell you the story from first to last," and he did. He added, "I don't know what it is. I guess no one else does, either. But it's dead and in need of decent burial and that's the least that I can do. I can't bury it in the cemetery, so I suppose I'll have to find a place for it on the farm. I wonder if you could bring yourself to come out and say a word or two."

The minister gave the matter some deep consideration.

"I'm sorry, Mose," he said at last. "I don't believe I can. I am not sure at all the church would approve of it."

"This thing may not be human," said Old Mose, "but it is one of God's critters."

The minister [illegible] some more, and did some wondering out loud, but made up his mind finally that he couldn't do it.

So Mose went down the street to where his car was waiting and drove home, thinking about what heels some humans are.

Back at the farm again, he got a pick and shovel and went into the garden, and there, in one corner of it, he dug a grave. He went out to the machine shed to hunt up some boards to make the thing a casket, but it turned out that he had used the last of the lumber to patch up the hog pen.

MOSE went to the house and dug around in a chest in one of the back rooms which had not

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used for years, hunting for a sheet to use as a winding shroud, since there would be no casket. He couldn't find a sheet, but he did unearth an old white linen table cloth. He figured that would do, so he took it to the kitchen.

He pulled back the blanket and looked at the critter lying there in death and a sort of lump came into his throat at the thought of it — how it had died so lonely and so far from home without a creature of its own to spend its final hours with. And naked, too, without a stitch of clothing and with no possession, with not a thing to leave behind as a remembrance of itself.

He spread the table cloth out on the floor beside the bed and lifted the thing and laid it on the table cloth. As he laid it down, he saw the pocket in it — if it was a pocket — a sort of slitted flap in the center of what could be its chest. He ran his hand across the pocket area. There was a lump inside it. He crouched for a long moment beside the body, wondering what to do.

Finally he reached his fingers into the flap and took out the thing that bulged. It was a ball, a little bigger than a tennis ball, made of cloudy glass — or, at least, it looked like glass. He squatted there, staring at it, then took it to the window for a better look.

There was nothing strange at all about the ball. It was just a cloudy ball of glass and it had a rough, dead feel about it, just as the body had.

He shook his head and took it back and put it where he'd found it and wrapped the body securely in the cloth. He carried it to the garden and put it in the grave. Standing solemnly at the head of the grave, he said a few short words aid then shoveled in the dirt.

He had meant to make a mound above the grave and he had intended to put up a cross, but at the last he didn't do either one of these. There would be snoopers. The word would get around and they'd be coming out and hunting for the spot where he had buried this thing he had found out in the woods. So there must be no mound to mark the place and no cross as well. Perhaps it was for the best, he told himself, for what could he have carved or written on the cross?

By this time it was well past noon and he was getting hungry, but he didn't stop to eat, because there were other things to do. He went out into the pasture and caught up Bess and hitched her to the stoneboat and went down into the woods.

He hitched her to the birdcage that was wrapped around the tree and she pulled it loose as pretty as you please. Then he loaded it on the stoneboat and hauled it up the hill and stowed it in the back of the machine shed, in the far corner by the forge.

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After that, he hitched Bess to the garden plow and gave the garden a cultivating that it didn't need so it would be fresh dirt all over and no one could locate where he'd dug the grave.

HE was just finishing the plowing when Sheriff Doyle drove up and got out of the car. The sheriff was a soft-spoken man, but he was no dawdler. He got right to the point.

"I hear," he said, "you found something in the woods."

"That I did," said Mose.

"I hear it died on you."

"Sheriff, you heard right."

"I'd like to see it, Mose."

"Can't. I buried it. And I ain't telling where."

"Mose," the sheriff said, "I don't want to make you trouble, but you did an illegal thing. You can't go finding people in the woods and just bury them when they up and die on you."

"You talk to Doc Benson?"

The sheriff nodded. "He said it wasn't any kind of thing he'd ever seen before. He said it wasn't human."

"Well, then," said Mose, "I guess that lets you out. If it wasn't human, there could be no crime against a person. And if it wasn't owned, there ain't any crime against property. There's been no one around to claim they owned the thing, is there?"

The sheriff rubbed his chin. "I guess there hasn't. Maybe you're right. Where did you study law?"

"I never studied law. I never studied nothing. I just use common sense."

"Doc said something about the folks up at the university might want a look at it."

"I tell you, Sheriff," said Mose. "This thing came here from somewhere and it died. I don't know where it came from and I don't know what it was and I don't hanker none to know. To me it was just a living thing that needed help real bad. It was alive and it had its dignity and in death it commanded some respect. When the rest of you refused it decent burial, I did the best I could. And that is all there is to it."

"All right, Mose," the sheriff said, "if that's how you want it."

He turned around and stalked back to the car. Mose stood beside old Bess hitched to her plow and watched him drive away. He drove fast and reckless as if he might be angry.

Mose put the plow away and turned the horse back to the pasture and by now it was time to do chores again.

He got the chores all finished and made himself some supper and after supper sat beside the stove, listening to the ticking of the clock, loud in the silent house, and the crackle of the fire.

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All night long the house was lonely.

The next afternoon, as he was plowing corn, a reporter came and walked up the row with him and talked with him when he came to the end of the row. Mose didn't like this reporter much. He was too flip and he asked some funny questions, so Mose clammed up and didn't tell him much.

A few days later, a man showed up from the university and showed him the story the reporter had gone back and written. The story made fun of Mose.

"I'm sorry," the professor said. "These newspapermen are unaccountable. I wouldn't worry too much about anything they write."

"I don't," Mose told him.

The man from the university asked a lot of questions and made quite a point about how important it was that he should see the body.

But Mose only shook his head. "It's at peace," he said. "I aim to leave it that way."

The man went away disgusted, but still quite dignified.

For several days there were people driving by and dropping in, the idly curious, and there were some neighbors Mose hadn't seen for months. But he gave them all short shrift and in a little while they left him alone and he went on with his farming and the house stayed lonely.

He thought again that maybe he should get a dog, but he thought of Towser and he couldn't do it.

One day, working in the garden, he found the plant that grew out of the grave. It was a funny-looking plant and his first impulse was to root it out.

But he didn't do it, for the plant intrigued him. It was a kind he'd never seen before and he decided he would let it grow, for a while at least, to see what kind it was. It was a bulky, fleshy plant, with heavy, dark-green, curling leaves, and it reminded him in some ways of the skunk cabbage that burgeoned in the woods come spring.

There was another visitor, the queerest of the lot. He was a dark and intense man who said he was the president of a flying saucer club. He wanted to know if Mose had talked with the thing he'd found out in the woods and seemed terribly disappointed when Mose told him he hadn't. He wanted to know if Mose had found a vehicle the creature might have traveled in and Mose lied to him about it. He was afraid, the wild way the man was acting, that he might demand to search the place, and if he had, he'd likely have found the birdcage hidden in the machine shed back in the corner by the forge. But the man got to lecturing Mose about withholding vital information.

Finally Mose had taken all he

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could of it, so he stepped into the house and picked up the shotgun from behind the door. The president of the flying saucer club said good-by rather hastily and got out of there.

Farm life went on as usual, with the corn laid by and the haying started and out in the garden the strange plant kept on growing and now was taking shape. Old Mose couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the sort of shape it took and he spent long evening hours just standing in the garden, watching it and wondering if his loneliness were playing tricks on him.

THE morning came when he found the plant standing at the door and waiting for him. He should have been surprised, of course, but he really wasn't, for he had lived with it, watching it of eventide, and although he had not dared admit it even to himself, he had known what it was.

For here was the creature he'd found in the woods, no longer sick and keening, no longer close to death, but full of life and youth.

It was not the same entirely, though. He stood and looked at it and could see the differences — the little differences that might have been those between youth and age, or between a father and a son, or again the differences expressed in an evolutionary pattern.

"Good morning," said Mose, not feeling strange at all to be talking to the thing. "It's good to have you back."

The thing standing in the yard did not answer him. But that was not important; he had not expected that it would. The one important point was that he had something he could talk to.

"I'm going out to do the chores," said Mose. "You want to tag along?"

It tagged along with him and it watched him as he did the chores and he talked to it, which was a vast improvement over talking to himself.

At breakfast, he laid an extra plate for it and pulled up an extra chair, but it turned out the critter was not equipped to use a chair, for it wasn't hinged to sit.

Nor did it eat. That bothered Mose at first, for he was hospitable, but he told himself that a big, strong, strapping youngster like this one knew enough to take care of itself, and he probably didn't need to worry too much about how it got along.

After breakfast, he went out to the garden, with the critter accompanying him, and sure enough, the plant was gone. There was a collapsed husk lying on the ground, the outer covering that had been the cradle of the creature at his side.

Then he went to the machine shed and the creature saw the bird-

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cage and rushed over to it and looked it over minutely. Then it turned around to Mose and made a sort of pleading gesture.

Mose went over to it and laid his hands on one of the twisted bars and the critter stood beside him and laid its hands on, too, and they pulled together. It was no use. They could move the metal some, but not enough to pull it back in shape again.

They stood and looked at one another, although looking may not be the word, for the critter had no eyes to look with. It made some funny motions with its hands, but Mose couldn't understand. Then it lay down on the floor and showed him how the birdcage ribs were fastened to the base.

IT took a while for Mose to understand how the fastening worked and he never did know exactly why it did. There wasn't, actually, any reason that it should work that way.

First you applied some pressure, just the right amount at the exact and correct angle, and the bar would move a little. Then you applied some more pressure, again the exact amount and at the proper angle, and the bar would move some more. You did this three times and the bar came loose, although there was, God knows, no reason why it should.

Mose started a fire in the forge and shoveled in some coal and worked the bellows while the critter watched. But when he picked up the bar to put it in the fire, the critter got between him and the forge and wouldn't let him near. Mose realized then he couldn't — or wasn't supposed to — heat the bar to straighten it and he never questioned the entire rightness of it. For, he told himself, this thing must surely know the proper way to do it.

So he took the bar over to the anvil and started hammering it back into shape again, cold, without the use of fire, while the critter tried to show him the shape that it should be. It took quite a while, but finally it was straightened out to the critter's satisfaction.

Mose figured they'd have themselves a time getting the bar back in place again, but it slipped on as slick as could be.

Then they took off another bar and this one went faster, now that Mose had the hang of it.

But it was hard and grueling labor. They worked all day and only straightened out five bars.

It took four solid days to get the bars on the birdcage hammered into shape and all the time the hay was waiting to be cut.

But it was all right with Mose. He had someone to talk to and the house had lost its loneliness.

When they got the bars back in

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place, the critter slipped into the cage and starting fooling with a dingus on the roof of it that looked like a complicated basket. Mose, watching, figured that the basket was some sort of control.

The critter was discouraged. It walked around the shed looking for something and seemed unable to find it. It came back to Mose and made its despairing, pleading gesture. Mose showed it iron and steel; he dug into a carton where he kept bolts and clamps and bushings and scraps of metal and other odds and ends, finding brass and copper and even some aluminum, but it wasn't any of these.

And Mose was glad — a bit ashamed for feeling glad, but glad all the same.

For it had been clear to him that when the birdcage was all ready, the critter would be leaving him. It had been impossible for Mose to stand in the way of the repair of the cage, or to refuse to help. But now that it apparently couldn't be, he found himself well pleased.

Now the critter would have to stay with him and he'd have someone to talk to and the house would not be lonely. It would be welcome, he told himself, to have folks again. The critter was almost as good a companion as Towser.

NEXT morning, while Mose was fixing breakfast, he reached up in the cupboard to get the box of oatmeal and his hand struck the cigar box and it came crashing to the floor. It fell over on its side and the lid came open and the dollars went free-wheeling all around the kitchen.

Out of the corner of his eye, Mose saw the critter leaping quickly in pursuit of one of them. It snatched it up and turned to Mose, with the coin held between its fingers, and a sort of thrumming noise was coming out of the nest of worms on top of it.

It bent and scooped up more of them and cuddled them and danced a sort of jig, and Mose knew, with a sinking heart, that it had been silver the critter had been hunting.

So Mose got down on his hands and knees and helped the critter gather up all the dollars. They put them back into the cigar box and Mose picked up the box and gave it to the critter.

The critter took it and hefted it and had a disappointed look. Taking the box over to the table, it took the dollars out and stacked them in neat piles and Mose could see it was very disappointed.

Perhaps, after all, Mose thought, it had not been silver the thing had been hunting for. Maybe it had made a mistake in thinking that the silver was some other kind of metal.

Mose got down the oatmeal and poured it into some water and put

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it on the stove. When it was cooked and the coffee was ready, he carried his breakfast to the table and sat down to eat.

The critter still was standing across the table from him, stacking and restacking the piles of silver dollars. And now it showed him, with a hand held above the stacks, that it needed more of them. This many stacks, it showed him, and each stack so high.

Mose sat stricken, with a spoon full of oatmeal halfway to his mouth. He thought of all those other dollars, the iron kettle packed with them, underneath the floor boards in the living room. And

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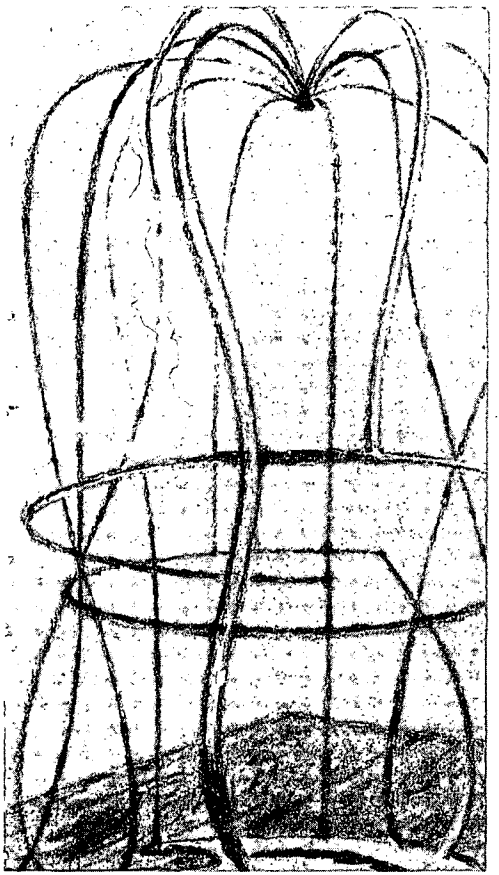

he couldn't do it; they were the only thing he had — except the critter now. And he could not give them up so the critter could go and leave him too.

He ate his bowl of oatmeal without tasting it and drank two cups of coffee. And all the time the critter stood there and showed him how much more it needed.

"I can't do it for you," Old Mose said. "I've done all you can expect of any living being. I found you in the woods and I gave you warmth and shelter. I tried to help you, and when I couldn't, at least I gave you a place to die in. I buried you and protected you from all those other people and I did not pull you up when you started growing once again. Surely you can't expect me to keep on giving endlessly."

But it was no good. The critter could not hear him and he did not convince himself.

HE got up from the table and walked into the living room with the critter trailing him. He loosened the floor boards and took out the kettle, and the critter, when it saw what was in the kettle, put its arms around itself and hugged in happniess.

They lugged the money out to the machine shed and Mose built a fire in the forge and put the kettle in the fire and started melting down that hard-saved money.

There were times he thought he couldn't finish the job, but he did.

The critter got the basket out of the birdcage and put it down beside the forge and dipped out the molten silver with an iron ladle and poured it here and there into the basket, shaping it in place with careful hammer taps.

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It took a long time, for it was exacting work, but finally it was done and the silver almost gone. The critter lugged the basket back into the birdcage and fastened it in place.

It was almost evening now and Mose had to go and do the chores. He half expected the thing might haul out the birdcage and be gone when he came back to the house. And he tried to be sore at it for its selfishness — it had taken from him and had not tried to pay him back — it had not, so far as he could tell, even tried to thank him. But he made a poor job of being sore at it.

It was waiting for him when he came from the barn carrying two pails full of milk. It followed him inside the house and stood around and he tried to talk to it. But he didn't have the heart to do much talking. He could not forget that it would be leaving, and the pleasure of its present company was lost in his terror of the loneliness to come.

For now he didn't even have his money to help ward off the loneliness.

As he lay in bed that night, strange thoughts came creeping in upon him — the thought of an even greater loneliness than he had ever known upon this runty farm, the terrible, devastating loneliness of the empty wastes that lay between the stars, a driven loneliness while one hunted for a place or person that remained a misty thought one could not define, but which it was most important one should find.

It was a strange thing for him to be thinking, and quite suddenly he knew it was no thought of his, but of this other that was in the room with him.

He tried to raise himself, he fought to raise himself, but he couldn't do it. He held his head up a moment, then fell back upon the pillow and went sound asleep.

NEXT morning, after Mose had eaten breakfast, the two of them went to the machine shed and dragged the birdcage out. It stood there, a weird alien thing, in the chill brightness of the dawn.

The critter walked up to it and started to slide between two of the bars, but when it was halfway through, it stepped out again and moved over to confront Old Mose.

"Good-by, friend," said Mose. "I'll miss you."

There was a strange stinging in his eyes.

The other held out its hand in farewell, and Mose took it and there was something in the hand he grasped, something round and smooth that was transferred from its hand to his.

The thing took its hand away and stepped quickly to the birdcage and slid between the bars. The hands reached for the basket and there was a sudden flicker and

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the birdcage was no longer there.

Mose stood lonely in the barnyard, looking at the place where there was no birdcage and remembering what he had felt or thought — or been told? — the night before as he lay in bed.

Already the critter would be there, out between the stars, in that black and utter loneliness, hunting for a place or thing or person that no human mind could grasp.

Slowly Mose turned around to go back to the house, to get the pails and go down to the barn to get the milking done.

He remembered the object in his hand and lifted his still-clenched fist in front of him. He opened his fingers and the little crystal ball lay there in his palm—and it was exactly like the one he'd found in the slitted flap in the body he had buried in the garden. Except that one had been dead and cloudy and this one had the living glow of a distant-burning fire.

Looking at it, he had the strange feeling of a happiness and comfort such as he had seldom known before, as if there were many people with him and all of them were friends.

He closed his hand upon it and the happiness stayed on — and it was all wrong, for there was not a single reason that he should be happy. The critter finally had left him and his money was all gone and he had no friends, but still he kept on feeling good.

He put the ball into his pocket and stepped spryly for the house to get the milking pails. He pursed up his whiskered lips and began to whistle and it had been a long, long time since he had even thought to whistle.

Maybe he was happy, he told himself, because the critter had not left without stopping to take his hand and try to say good-by.

And a gift, no matter how worthless it might be, how cheap a trinket, still had a basic value in simple sentiment. It had been many years since anyone had bothered to give him a gift.

IT was dark and lonely and unending in the depths of space with no Companion. It might be long before another was obtainable.

It perhaps was a foolish thing to do, but the old creature had been such a kind savage, so fumbling and so pitiful and eager to help. And one who travels far and fast must likewise travel light. There had been nothing else to give.

—CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

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KING OF THE PLANET

No monarchy was ever more legal than his — he had outlived every last challenger for the throne!

By WILSON TUCKER

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

THE king was annoyingly awakened before dawn by a noise in the sky.

The noise was an ear-splitting roar, an avalanche of sound, a rushing, tumbling, thunderous reverberation which filled the heavens from one horizon to another, the kind of noise — and the volume — that might be expected on the day the sun cracked open. The shattering thunder shook the stout old building, causing the king of the planet to creep from his shabby bed and go to the window. The dawn was still an hour or more away.

Nothing but empty sky and the roseate flush in the east was visible from the tiny window, but yet the echoes of intruding sound lapped about the building. Blinking away sleep and muttering at the trespass,

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the king went to the door, circuitously avoiding the cracked marble urn in the exact center of the room which contained his drinking water. He stepped out into the high grasses surrounding the building and turned to look skyward. It was there, as he had guessed.

The source of the monstrous noise was a monstrous vehicle hanging many miles above him, as stationary as a rock, but even at that distance its enormous size was apparent. The thing hung effortlessly in the early morning sky, washed with the new sunlight, and seemed to be supported on small tongues of flame which everywhere studded its massive belly. A coruscating envelope of pale blue, much like ancient neon lighting, laved the vehicle to create an eerie illusion in the yellowish rays of the sun. The tremendous sound that had awakened him had been caused by the braking effort of the great machine.

The king studied it closely for many minutes, watching for a Sign — an Omen, searching for a sacred Token to suggest that it might be something other than what his mundane senses had taken it to be. He waited, but a Revelation did not come. There was nothing about the machine to excite his hopes.

It was only a starship.

IT had disturbed his sleep and it was nothing more than a starship, probably inhabited by a pack of crazy fools bent on exploring each new planet to fall within their sights. Now they had discovered his, and in a few hours hordes of them would be descending on him.

The starship was too large and ungainly to land, but the people on it — if they were people — would come down on him like mosquitoes, in small scouting vessels, and conduct themselves like imbeciles on a picnic. Their military men would eye him suspiciously and cast dark glances at the surrounding forests. Their linguists would buzz about with primitive signs and symbols in an effort to establish communication. Their botanists would uproot great masses of weeds. Their archeologists would ransack the ruins and gouge deep holes in the ground, plundering graves, to carry away what they believed to be precious treasures, while their commander — ahh, the commander!

That nincompoop would fatuously plant a flag, or its gaudy equivalent, in the soil and claim ownership of the new world for his distant sovereign. The nincompoop would cheerfully ignore, of course, the very obvious fact that this world already possessed a sovereign.

A pox on them. Let them come down and play, and then go away again. They were not Significant. The starship had offered no Sign, and he was not greatly interested in its coming.

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The king of the planet returned indoors and let himself down on the hard bed. He ruminated a short while and then drifted off to sleep, confident that their noisy scurryings would awaken him later.

He had momentarily considered closing the door, and then decided against it. The prying archeologists would probably come inside anyway; they would not be able to resist temptation, for the king's indigent residence was a marble mausoleum nearly hidden among the weeds and wild grasses of an incredibly ancient cemetery.

The king of the planet lived in a mausoleum because the structure had withstood the ravages of time, because he had made it somewhat comfortable, and because it had seemed the best place to wait.

A FEW minutes after sunrise, a single scout left the mother ship and landed almost directly beneath it, resting quietly—but watchfully — on a grassy clearing well away from the dense woods. More than half of the crew of twenty had emerged from the scout and fanned out, each crew member going about his particular business. Some of their number had already discovered a promising mound and were bringing up heavy equipment to probe its probable mystery. One man was taking samples of the vegetation, while another was trapping insects in the soil.

Within the small scout ship, a woman hunched over a set of scanning instruments, her head concealed in an enveloping hood, the better to watch a series of glass plates. She listened to a contact speaker fastened behind an ear and spoke into a throat microphone. There was a gentle excitement in her voice, but no trace of fear or hysteria.

"The life-form is approaching from the northwest. Movement slow but progress steady. Near you, Seven."

And a response from the clearing: "Seven, check."

The woman continued, dividing her attention between two devices: "It appears to be warm-blooded and intelligent. It does not show fear of us, nor does there seem to be curiosity. I see nothing to indicate a weapon; it is carrying something that might be a walking stick. Are you tracking, Seven?"

"Negative," Seven reported. "The trees interfere."

"Eight?" the woman asked next.

"Eight, negative," a new voice said. "I read nothing but soil life."

"There are birds in the far distance," she advised. "I expect our arrival has frightened them away. I have discovered no animal life except for — It has stopped." She scanned the disc attentively. "It has put down the walking stick. Now it is behind a tree. I am receiving only a small positive signal."

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A deep male voice cut into the circuit. "Nineteen here," it said. "Your animal *is* intelligent. It put down the stick to avoid its being mistaken for a weapon, and now is likely peeping at us from behind a tree. I'll be right out with a translator." The male voice was exultant. "Gently, gentlemen, gently. We've found a prize!"

The woman at the scanner spoke up. "The object is moving — coming directly toward the vessel. Seven, it is almost upon you! Don't you see it?"

"Nega — *correction.*" His voice jumped. "It's coming out now. I see it!"

"Eight, move in and cover," the woman snapped. "Two, start recording."

"I'm forty-five seconds ahead of you," Two replied dryly. "Sight, sound and depth."

"Be careful!" Nineteen cried. "Don't scare it away. What is it — what does it look like?"

THE communication channel was silent for a moment and then Seven said, "It looks like you. It's a *man.*"

"Are you certain?" the woman demanded.

"It's a man," the dry voice of the recorder cut in. "I can tell by his innards."

Seven reported: "An old man; quite aged by the looks of him. Extremely long hair and long beard. He is naked — I think. And he needs a bath."

"Weapons?"

"Negative, unless there is one hidden under the beard. *There* — he's out of the woods. See him?"

"I see him," she answered, and stared for a long moment. "I wish I could be more impressed. Well, I suppose we must extend the customary welcome. He is the only life-form—" she corrected herself — "the only human to reveal sign on this planet. Stand by, Seven."

The king of the planet left the shadow of the trees and made his careful way into the clearing. He moved slowly because he could not trust his limbs to any reasonable speed and because he did not want to frighten the visitors into an unfriendly act. He had no wish to be a cripple after their departure.

The king paused ten or twelve feet short of the nearest intruder and examined the ship. His examination was a cursory one because he was little interested in its origin, its means of locomotion, or its physical properties. There had been others like it and unlike it, and doubtless there were more to come. The ship and the travelers were merely transients.

The impudent young fellow a dozen feet away stared at him with a friendly, idiotic grin. His feet were braced wide apart, his hands were outstretched — palms upward — in the usual gesture of welcome,

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and not too far away his mate waited with one hand resting on the butt of a weapon. They were military men, making their customary two-faced show of welcome.

The king looked at the friendly face and the grinning lips and wanted to snarl, looked at the upturned palms and wanted to spit on them, but he realized that such behavior would only complicate matters. It was better to help them tidy up their business and send them on their way.

He stuck out his two hands in an imitative gesture and tried to smile. It didn't quite come off.

"Now that's done," he grunted. "Get on with your picking and clear off my planet!"

SEVEN did not understand him, of course, and promptly launched into a lengthy torrent of unintelligible speech which was the Response Courteous, the standard rejoinder to a native welcome.

The Response Courteous was grandiose, pompous and rhetorical, punctuated with graceful gestures and primitive symbolisms; the eloquent sentry called upon the local rain god to increase the old man's crops and upon the sun god to bless his aged bones; he complimented the native on his health, wealth and appearance, thanked him for so graciously offering the hospitality of his planet, begged him to allow them to stay a few days more that they might explore and catalogue the new world, flattered him with the observation that no other mud ball in the Universe was so beautiful as this one, assured him that they would do harm to none, and ended — finally — by respectfully inquiring after the old one's lovely wife (wives?) and sturdy children.

It was an impressive speech, recited letter-perfect from the field manual.

The sentry then bowed and mumbled an aside into his microphone. "I don't think I want to meet his lovely wife. I wish I was upwind of him."

Two, the dry commentator operating the recording machine, suggested: "Perhaps you'd better run through that again. Nothing stirred beneath the leathery hide."

"I'll make you a wager," Seven retorted. "I don't believe he *has* a rain god."

"Patience, gentlemen — I'm coming." Nineteen came running from the lock of the scout ship. He carried a large bronze box which contained his own specialized exploring tool, and he was wearing a large, pleased smile. Behind him ran a pretty, youthful girl carrying two pillows.

The newcomers slowed cautiously as they approached the king of the planet and set down their equipment for his inspection. The

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king ignored Nineteen and his box to stare at the girl and her pillows.

She dropped to her knees, placed a pillow on the ground behind him, and invited him to sit. The king sat, staring at the girl's bosom and bare legs. She smiled winningly and moved over to place a pillow for her superior. Nineteen seated himself and opened the lid of the bronze box. It contained an array of instruments and two slim bronze cables which terminated in handgrips.

NINETEEN placed a microphone on the ground between himself and the native, switched on his apparatus and motioned to the assistant. The girl removed the coiled cables from their nest and gave one to the old man, showing him how to hold the grooved handle with his curled fingers. The other cable was given to the smiling translator. An electrical connection was completed between the two men, monitored by the translating rig.

"H-2 type," Nineteen murmured into his throat microphone.

"H-2 *sub-a*," the distant recorder corrected him matter-of-factly. "Plus *sub*-something else which I am not qualified to identify. I recognize only a vague *x* quality to his digestive and regenerative systems."

"Beetles and birchbark," was Seven's snide reply.

"Perhaps, but I daresay Hundred-Ten would like to lay him on her surgical table upstairs. He'd make a splendid subject for study."

Nineteen cleared his throat meaningfully and the communication circuit went silent. He smiled again at the dour old man who was eying the girl.

"How do you do, sir?"

The king of the planet stared down at the handgrip in his gnarled fingers and wondered how they'd managed that trick; he had both heard and *felt* the smiling idiot's words, and the utilization of the two senses enabled him to grasp the meaning of the question. It also caused him to realize they would understand his replies only too well, unless he was careful.

(The recorder whispered: "Curiosity, and mental reservations.")

("I expected it," Nineteen replied.) To the old one, he said, "I am Nineteen, a linguist. Who are you?"

No harm in answering that. "I am the king of the planet."

Nineteen watched the analyzers in the bronze box. (His communicator whispered: "Truth, pride.") "What are you called, sir?"

The king grunted. "Many things. Ahasuerus, Joseph, Isaac, Salatheil ben Sadi . . . I am called many names."

(The whisper: "Bitterness.")

Nineteen correctly deduced that the old one had referred to him-

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self as the leader, or overlord, of the entire world; but the multiplicity of names confused him and he was not certain that he could pronounce any of them accurately.

"JO-SEFF," he said, and watched to see if the native took offense at a possible mispronunciation. "The leader of the world. Where are your people, Jo-seff?"

"The damned fools are dead," the king retorted. "Every one of them."

"They have expired? *All* of them?"

"That's what I said."

"How did they die, Jo-seff? Why did they die?"

"Because they were damned fools."

("Vituperation, anger, vague hatred.")

Nineteen repeated gently, "How did they die? What caused *all* their deaths, Jo-seff?"

"Peace!" the king spat. "Eternal peace. Senility, sterility, boredom, retrogression. They curled up in their chosen wombs and died."

"I don't understand, Jo-seff."

"That's too bad." The king abruptly switched languages because it pleased him to do so and because his interrogator was becoming too inquisitive. He lapsed into Latin, a tongue barely remembered. "They abolished conflict and returned to Paradise. *That* was the end of them."

(Two reported: "Evasive tactics, but still truth.")

Nineteen frowned and realized something was amiss. He studied his analyzers but found nothing wrong there; they continued to monitor and report the speech patterns in the normal fashion, giving normal readings, but despite that, he recognized a change in routine. The ancient king's subjects had stopped fighting among themselves and perished as a result—that much was clear. But the exact manner of their going and the last two sentences were puzzling.

("Is this doubletalk?" he asked the recorder.)

("No, sir. Clear and straightforward.")

"They died suffering peace, Jo-seff?"

"They did."

"How can this be?"

"Easier than you think."

"You did not die with them?" Nineteen asked tactfully.

The king glowered, considering the question silly.

Nineteen rephrased the question. "Can you tell me, sir, why you did not suffer this same death?"

"I refused peace."

"It was a matter of acceptance or rejection?"

"It was."

"You are the only living human in all this world?"

"I am."

"I do not understand how they

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all suffered and died of this peace simultaneously."

"I didn't say that!" the king snapped. "Idiot." He searched among the languages familiar to him and said, "Degeneration. Dry rot requires only a few centuries."

AGAIN the interpreter noted a subtle but baffling difference to the response. As before, the old man's answer was partly understood and partly guessed at, and, as before, the analyzing equipment performed in normal fashion, but for the second time there had been an undefined *change* in the procedure. "Degeneration" and "dry rot" were undoubtedly a form of slow death; while "centuries" was probably one or more measurable units of time.

"I ask your pardon, great leader," Nineteen continued smoothly. "I believe I now understand. Your subjects suffered peace for a number of centuries and gradually perished; a kind of lingering death. Is that correct?"

The king of the planet nodded dourly, his attentive eyes following the lithe movements of the young girl as she fidgeted in the grass.

"Thank you, sir. And what is a *century?*"

"One hundred years."

"Ah, yes. And what constitutes a *year,* sir?"

"One revolution about the sun!" The king looked at his questioner with scorn. "Is a star-traveler ignorant of the most basic astronomy?"

Nineteen jumped with astonishment and listened to the murmur of surprise on the communication circuit. "Ah — then you *are* aware of our identity?"

The king was disgusted. "I know a starship when I see one, you fool!"

"Your great wisdom pleases me, honorable leader. Have *other* starships visited your kingdom?"

"Of course. How else would I know, stupid?"

(The woman at the scanning plates said excitedly: "There are no records of any known ship visiting this planet.")

(The recording engineer said: "Nonetheless, he's telling the truth. And he thinks us a pack of fools.")

("Most amazing," Nineteen commented. "And perhaps we are — he certainly was not excited to see us, remember. Evidently his memory antedates our records. Let's put the prime question.")

Nineteen returned his attention to the native. "August leader, you must have lived a very long time to have watched your people perish over the centuries, and to have seen the visiting starships. Good sir, what is the number of your glorious years?"

Bitterly, the king of the planet told him.

The answer was not immediately intelligible, for it involved still another *x* unit of local time, and, to

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compound matters, there had been still another shift of tonal values. Grimly, not unmixed with annoyance, the king once more changed languages and answered the question — quite honestly — in Moabitish.

His questioner could only determine that the old man's unusual life span had stretched over an *x* number of centuries, and he had to be content with that for the time being. But the interrogation continued.

FOR the remainder of that day, and the following three, the space visitors posed endless questions. They were insatiable.

Nineteen, prompted by whispers from within the ship, from those waiting far above, and from the technicians working about the clearing, valiantly attempted to pump the king of his knowledge of anthropology, archeology, astronomy, architecture, biology (running from botany through zoology — although biometrics proved to be a most frustrating business), chemistry, commerce, electronics, geology and geography, history (a fruitful mass of data!), mathematics, medicine and pharmacy, mythology, numeration — the list of subjects and the many detailed questions pertinent to each appeared to have no end.

The visitors pried and the old man answered in his fashion. He darted from one subfamily of languages to another, leaping from tongue to dialect and back again, watching the interpreter with malicious amusement. Without warning, he would turn from ultra-modern English to Prakrit, to Illyrian, to French, to Avestan, to Vulgate Latin, to Chaldean, to Pahlavi and then to Umbrian, always secretly amused in the belief that he was bewildering the inquisitor. His mastery of the many languages was as complete as his aged memory would permit and he was enjoying himself — until he suddenly discovered that the space visitor was wise to his game.

At some time during the lengthy sessions, the visitor had discovered the subterfuge and thereafter ignored the dazzling changes. The king of the planet lapsed into Aramic, his favorite tongue, and remained there. The malicious fun was lost.

The sessions were not continuous. They paused many times to rest because the king tired, and because he would fall into moody silences that could not be broken until he was ready to break them. They stopped then to eat and drink, and the young girl would bring food from the ship and place it before the old one.

He ate sparingly.

They took the time to inspect the many small discoveries the archeologists were bringing back from

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the ancient cemetery, and at the close of each day they closed up shop to sleep. The king refused the invitation to sleep in the scout, or in the mother ship hanging far above, always preferring to return to his mausoleum.

Before the king quit the clearing at the end of the first day, he made a small request, a mild one which surely could offend nobody, but it had to be refused. The translator was very sorry, but he simply could not permit the young girl to accompany the king back to his bed for the night. It just wasn't done, and besides the girl was under age. Respectful regret and all that.

The king strode away, greatly irritated.

ON the morning of the second day, the king was awakened by the noise the archeologists were making in the mausoleum, and he chased them outdoors. He let them know with strong language and unmistakable gestures that his home was the one sacred place barred to them. They could *not* knock holes in the many vaults lining the mausoleum walls — not even the small holes which would admit their camera lenses.

On the morning of the third day, the visitors had charted the local time sequences to their satisfaction, and the newfound knowledge excited them.

Nineteen probed for a solution to the riddle.

"Great sir, did many of your people live through centuries? That is, for many hundreds of years?"

"No."

"What was their usual lifetime?"

"The good died young — they knew better than to stay alive. The worthless ones stayed longer; they were too mean to die."

"But what number of years, great leader?" Nineteen strove for the impression of worshipping at the old man's hardened feet. "How young is young?"

"Thirty or forty years," the king said impatiently.

"And how old is old?"

"Seventy, eighty, ninety. A few lived past the century."

"Ah, yes. But that extreme age was a rarity, was it not? Even when your subjects were not suffering peace?"

"Of course."

"Pardon me, glorious one, but I do not understand your age. Why is it that you live so long?"

"I rejected peace — I've told you that!"

"You did, good sir, but we still do not understand. Is not peace a desirable attainment?"

"It is, until you get it. And then you rot."

"And you rejected peace and thus avoided rotting. I'm afraid that isn't as simple as it sounds, but then I do not expect to understand the

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theory. But, sir, there must be some *rational* reason for your tremendous age, some *fact* that you have not made known to us."

The king stared at him, unwilling to answer.

"Have you discovered the secret of eternal life?" Nineteen asked anxiously. "Do you take drugs? Is it a dietary matter? Have you found some unknown substance which prolongs your life?"

THE king let his attention wander and fastened his gaze on the young girl, who was helping a botanist.

("Keep at it," the recording engineer whispered. "You scored a clean hit with one of those questions. His pulse raced.")

"My own life," Nineteen said smoothly, "and the lives of my companions are reasonably long. We may expect to live about two hundred years, if we are fortunate."

The king pointed at the girl. "How old is she?"

"Not yet forty." Nineteen smiled. "She is my daughter, an apprentice to this crew." Without changing his conversational tone, he asked, "How old are you?"

The king replied with the identical answer given on the first day.

"But sir!" the translator declared. "That amounts to more than three thousand years! And that is incredible; I can scarcely believe it. How does one live for three thousand years by simply rejecting peace?"

"It depends upon the manner of rejection," the old one said dourly. "And the time, and the place, and the catalyst." His hungering gaze would not leave the girl.

"I'm afraid I do not understand you at all."

"I didn't expect you to."

"It just isn't possible to exist for so long!"

"I'm existing." The king raised his eyes to the scout ship. "And that fellow yonder knows I'm not lying."

(The whisper: "He isn't lying, but you've hit on something. I believe he is superstitious. Question him.")

Nineteen did, digging patiently but as deeply as he was able, utilizing his every skill to draw out the old man. He reverted to a subject they had discussed on a previous day, mythology, and examined it more carefully than before.

A number of significant things came to light which had been passed over before, and these new factors were weighed and balanced against all the conversations so far recorded.

In the end, Nineteen admitted to a partial defeat. The day drew to a close and he packed away his equipment, preparatory to returning to the mother ship; he wished he could remain a month or a year with the aged native, but that was not possible. They were leaving after darkness fell.

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LUGGING their gear and their specimens, their recordings and their artifacts, the explorers returned to the scout. The military men dismantled the tall pole which had been planted in the clearing, and reverently packed away the varicolored ball that had spun atop it.

Food and drink were left outside, as a final tribute to the king of the planet, and the scout was made secure for lifting.

"It is imperative that we return to this planet," Nineteen declared later. "Perhaps in a century or two. It is important to know if he will still be living."

"He will be," Seven predicted lightly. "Bettles and birchbark will keep going forever."

"Not forever," Nineteen contradicted, ignoring the levity. "Even he admitted it. But that last session was most productive; it *must* have high priority in translation and analysis. I wish I understood it more clearly now. No — he won't live forever. He is aware of his eventual death, and, if my intuition is correct, he is looking forward to it. Can you imagine three thousand years?"

"I can't," Seven replied.

"Nor I, but I expect we will find he is very much correct in the figure. No wonder he wants release! His future death is hopelessly entangled in some supernatural fantasy; I no more understand *that* than I understand his fantastic reason for longevity. What is myth and what is real?"

Two said, "He believes in those old gods of the myth, believes in them flatly and without question. Do you suppose there is something to mythology after all?"

Nineteen smiled and shrugged. "I'm too old to say *nonsense*, however much I am tempted. But how many hundreds of fantastic legends have we stumbled over? How many wild fictions of imaginary men and imaginary monsters? They persist even in civilized areas. This one appears to be simply another variation — except that *this* one is living."

Seven laughed. "Yes — in a cemetery."

"He explained that. Again the explanation is caught up in myth. His god, or gods, are supposed to revisit the planet some day and take up all the spirits; when they left thousands of years ago, they promised they would come a second time. This second visitation is supposed to be a universal reawakening day, and the old leader sleeps in the midst of the dead so that he will not be overlooked when that day comes. It is the release he is expecting."

"Release from eternal life? That is a favor?"

Two cut in dryly, "Try it sometime."

"I might, if I get the chance,"

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Seven agreed. "How did the old boy manage it?"

"I don't know how it really happened," Nineteen said. "But according to his mythology, he angered the gods by rejecting peace and was sentenced to live until they came again. The gods won't permit his death until that day. I wish I could get to the *truth* of the matter!"

THE king of the planet heard the starship go. It quit the sky with a repetition of the thunder which had accompanied its arrival, and after its passing the world was strangely quiet.

It was always like that after a big ship had passed, but presently the night sounds would return and the lonely world would be normal again. In a century or so, or perhaps three, or five, another ship would come and more visitors would descend on him, annoying him, questioning him, taunting him.

Without realizing it, they always taunted him.

For none of them was the one visitor he awaited.

— WILSON TUCKER

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

""Don't stop experimenting with your forecast," we are commanded by our readers, and we're not stopping. With a giant 196 pages to move around in, we enjoy the exciting combinations made possible, so why should we stop?

Always a novella or serial to lead off with?

Why?

How, instead, about a great clutch of novelets? For instance, THE UNDETECTED by George O. Smith, whose mastery has taken a huge leap forward; you'll find here a pulse-pounding duel the like of which has never been in print before. And PROSPECTOR'S SPECIAL by Robert Sheckley: lost in the vast Scorpion Desert of Venus, he needs all the courage a man can own — and every bit of credit he can raise! And a newcomer, A. J. Offutt, who ought to appear here more often, with BLACKSWORD: being a live-wire political scientist, he needs just one good connection — to get high-voltage power out of a single hot lead!

And more. Don't be too aghast if you find just under half a dozen novelets in the issue.

That leaves room for short stories, those vital smaller items that can be read in a quick break of one sort or another. But, we promise, no artificially padded contents page.

Willy Ley, off on a data-gathering hunt, won't reveal the title of his upcoming science article until he has the whole thing in hand. Says it's highly interesting, and that is all we can get out of him as of even date. Now what the devil can it be? Can hardly wait to find out . . .

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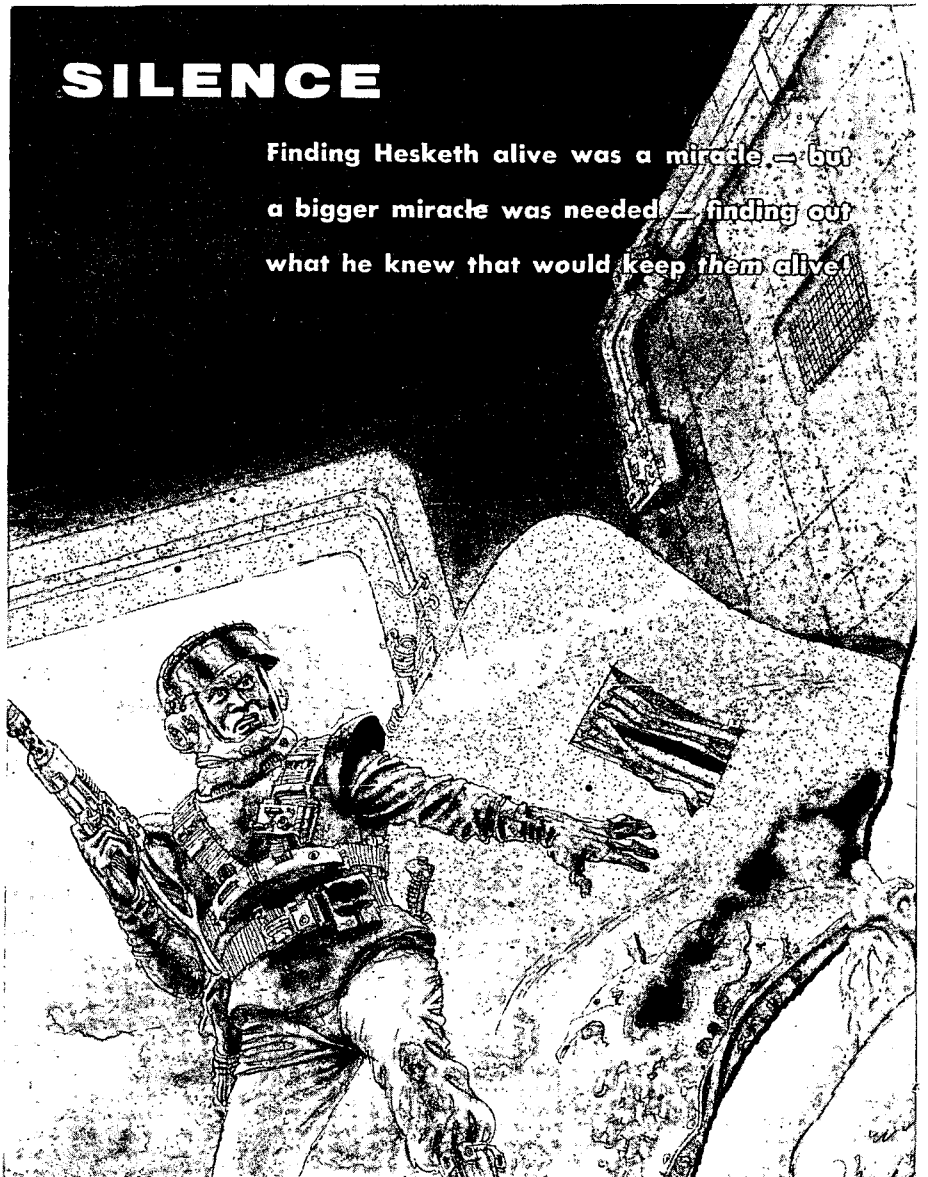
SILENCE

Finding Hesketh alive was a miracle — but a bigger miracle was needed — finding out what he knew that would keep *them* alive!



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By JOHN BRUNNER

HESKETH knew the cell so well, it was almost a part of him. But then there wasn't very much of it to know.

From floor to ceiling, it measured seven feet; from end to end, it measured seven feet; from side to side, it measured seven feet. In this harshly symmetrical volume, there were two acceleration bunks with straps, and a sort of sink that had two disparate uses. Once there had also been a radio transmitter with a subspace call key, but that had been removed so long ago that even the mark on the wall where it had been attached had faded into invisibility.

In fact, as Hesketh was still capable of remembering when he turned his mind to the subject, which was seldom, it was an exact copy of the interior of a survival capsule. Or *maybe* — for the Charnogs were of an economical turn of mind — it *was* the interior of a survival capsule. Hesketh had more important things on his mind than such fiddling distinctions.

The Charnog who should have fed him was late.

It had never happened before, and his stomach, conditioned to an unvarying routine, was beginning to grumble. Patiently, he sat down

Illustrated by MORROW

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on the edge of the bunk he always used in preference to the other (though there was no difference between the two). But the strangeness of the occurrence disturbed him.

NORMALLY, his mind gave him no trouble these days. The flow of his thoughts moved as steadily as water through a smoothly turned pipe. But now he found an emotion forming: a wish that they would come and feed him so he could go to sleep on a full stomach.

The idea of doing *something* about it, of course, didn't enter his head. There *wasn't* anything he could do about it.

An imaginary itch started on his back, and he contorted himself to scratch it. When that distraction had grown dull, he found himself shivering, and that was odd. The clothes he had had on when he was first brought here had long ago become unwearable through much scrubbing, but the Charnogs liked a warm climate and he had never been cold.

They had allowed him to keep the calendar watch on his wrist when he was caught, once they had found he had no time sense of his own, but the unchanging pace of life in his tiny room had keyed him to a routine where he no longer glanced at the dial. He did so now, and had to knit his brows to remember what position of the hands corresponded to feeding time.

Whatever it was, it wasn't the one now showing.

Finally he got up and went to the door, pressing his ear against it. He knew there was a passage there, partly because he might well have seen it when he was brought here, though he no longer remembered that period very clearly, and partly because he had heard the slithering progress of Charnogs go from end to end of it more times than he could count.

There was a noise out there now.

But it was *not* the noise of a Charnog.

It was a cautious noise, with a sort of irregular double beat to it, and it sounded as though it was made by something large and very clumsy. It awoke things in Hesketh's brain which had lain dormant for too long, and his shivering became uncontrollable.

He sat down again on the bunk and clutched himself to preserve his body heat. This noise, it occurred to him, must have something to do with his food being late, and he felt a dull resentment.

After a time, whatever was making the noise came to his door and stopped. There were fumbling sounds from the region of the catch on the outside of the sliding panel; then there were impatient movements and something white-hot and sizzling seared through the

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lock and burned a track down the opposite wall. Hesketh leaped to his feet and turned to run.

There was nowhere to run to.

"Well, I'll be damned and blasted!" A bellowing voice hurt his ears. "A *man!*"

SLOWLY Hesketh faced the armored and helmeted figure in the doorway. It had been a long time since he used words, but his mind filtered the essential meaning out of what had been said.

"Man," he repeated to himself, and though his voice sounded rusty, the actual noise seemed satisfactory. He managed a complete sentence. "Yes, I'm a man."

"Well, I'm damned!" the newcomer said again. He took a pace back and sent a giant shout echoing down the passage. Then he held out his hand.

But Hesketh had forgotten what to do with it.

The stranger shrugged, exposed his teeth and pushed back his helmet. Sniffing distorted his face, and he spoke in the same bellowing voice. "Boy, I bet you're glad to see me! My name's Walters — Second Consolidation Fleet. We got the Charnogs out of this sector today and we're taking a look at what we've got. How long have you been in this stinking hole, anyway? No, don't answer that — you probably don't know."

"My name is Hesketh," said the prisoner very quietly, not attempting to imitate the other's shouting. "And I do know how long I have been here. I have been here twenty-eight years, two months and seventeen days."

Now other men were gathering in the passage, weapons cautiously at the ready, to exclaim with wonder in the same high monotonous roar. Hesketh, during the whole period of his captivity, had heard no noise except his own feet padding in his cell, the splash of water and the slither of Charnogs. He had forgotten how loud a human voice could be. So far as he could, he shut his ears to the babble.

They brought him clothing and a spacesuit, and somehow he got them on, thinking of the outside, the universe that had been a dimming memory for twenty-eight years. But it was still unreal beside the discomfort in his stomach.

When they led him out into the passage, he looked around eagerly, hoping to see his bowl lying beside one of the dead Charnogs that littered the floor. Walters noticed his actions and grinned.

"Good to see them getting a bit of their own back, hey, Hesketh?" he asked loudly.

Hesketh shook his head; that gesture came back automatically. "No, I'm hungry."

"Starved you, did they, as well as penning you up? The bastards! Well, as soon as we get you aboard

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a ship, you'll be properly looked after."

Hesketh was going to explain that he wasn't starving. It was just that these people had ruined the Charnogs' careful arrangements for looking after him. But at that point he was hustled into a cramped compartment which shot suddenly up, adding another discomfort to that of hunger. Then the door of the compartment opened, and they were on the surface of a night-dark plain.

Big, brilliant stars leaped out of a deep heaven and struck at Hesketh's mind. A distant horizon jarred his eyes into a focus they hadn't used all the time he was in his seven-by-seven-by-seven cell.

It was no wonder he blacked out.

"THE doc's given him a good intravenous meal, so he should be strong enough when he wakes up. Still, the shock must have been pretty considerable. When you've resigned yourself to dying a prisoner, I guess it's an upsetting experience to be rescued."

That was Walters' voice. It was the familiar timbre more than the actual words which caught Hesketh's attention as he struggled back to consciousness. While the next voice took up the thread, he paid it very little attention, except to try to work out where it differed from Walters'.

"Especially after all this time," the second speaker agreed. "I've never heard of a similar case. I sent someone to look through the casualty lists about that time, but he drew a blank on the service list, and I haven't much hope from the civilian side — speak of the devil. Thanks, Lal."

Something rustled, and the voice went on.

"Yes, this looks like it! Abdul Hesketh, reported missing from transport 62965, just under thirty years ago. And what's more — "

"Civilian intelligence!" said Walters excitedly "Not only do we get someone back from the Charnogs — we get someone who's really in a position to tell us something about them! This *is* a stroke of luck, isn't it, sir?"

"I think he's waking up," said the other voice warningly, and Hesketh remembered that his eyelids had flickered a moment before. The light had been blindingly yellow compared to the bluish-tinted Charnog illumination he was used to, but he had seen that the room was clean-looking and large, and his nose told him it smelled different from his cell.

A hospital, he remembered. *That's right — a hospital.*

"Are you feeling all right now, Hesketh?" Walters asked.

Hesketh wet his lips. "Yes," he answered, and managed to get his eyes open and keep them open. Walters' face loomed large beside

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the bed. Another man, heavier-faced, was beside him.

"This is Commodore Vozhdov," Walters explained. "He was directing the raid that got you away from the Charnogs."

Vozhdov smiled. "Well, Hesketh, you're about the luckiest man in history, you know. We were just saying we'd never heard of anyone being rescued from the Charnogs before. You've had a pretty rough time, but that's over."

"It wasn't so bad," said Hesketh. The commodore's voice, like all the others, was too loud and grated on his ears. "I got fed, and I was warm enough, and they let me have water to wash in."

"But they kept you cooped up in that tiny room for twenty-eight years!" Walters protested. "That's — that's inhuman!"

"Charnogs aren't human," Hesketh pointed out.

Vozhdov recovered from that one the quicker of the two. "Of course they're not," he agreed soothingly. "Well, I guess the first thing you'll want to do is to find out what's happened all the time you've been a prisoner. Nothing much, I'm sorry to say — touch and go, give and take, pretty much a stalemate. Thanks to you, though, I expect victory, and in damned short order!"

"Thanks to me?" Hesketh was confused; abstracts like the concept of victory troubled him.

"Well, no other man has ever been in such a favorable position to study the Charnogs," Walters pointed out. "And you were in civilian intelligence, weren't you, before you — uh — before your capture?"

Hesketh said nothing. He frowned a little.

"We aren't going to get very far with this at the moment," said Vozhdov, addressing Walters. "But as soon as Doc gives the okay, I want him brought around to me, and we'll bring him up to date on what's happened. I figure the sooner he starts leading a normal human life again, the more help he'll be."

Hesketh shut his eyes.

THE doctor's name was Shu; he was small, rather dingy of complexion and soft of voice. That alone made Hesketh prepared to like him better than Vozhdov or Walters, and he obediently agreed to being shaved and examined.

There were other people, but they made no direct impact on him. Once he had seen his own face in the mirror, and been surprised to find how much it resembled theirs, he gave up trying to remember the differences between their features. They seemed as impersonal as the many machines Shu employed to test his nervous reflexes, to ascertain his metabolic level, to study the pattern of his encephalograms.

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The green hospital gowns were soothing. But the hard surface table — much harder than his familiar acceleration bunk — was uncomfortable, and the atmosphere of detachment irked him, so that he was almost glad when Shu finally turned off the current from the last of the machines and looked directly at him.

"You're all right," he said quietly. "At least, you're in better shape than anyone would have expected. You're confused, naturally, and your reflexes are slow, but physically you're as fit as I am."

Hesketh didn't speak, and Shu, after hesitating a moment, crossed the room to his desk communicator. "Lieutenant Walters, please," he said, and drummed with his fingers on the desk until he was answered.

The shock of hearing Walters speak made Hesketh look around and expect to see him; then he remembered and relaxed. A little.

"Walters, if you'd like to come to sick quarters — Commodore Vozhdov wanted you to take Hesketh to him."

"Be there in just a moment," said Walters.

While waiting, Hesketh looked at the apparatus the doctor had used. It was disturbing. It wasn't so much that it was unfamiliar; rather, it was in some way *too* familiar.

He was almost glad when Walters turned up, hearty and loud-voiced as before. He followed without protest and without trying to remember the way they took, as Walters led him down corridors and into and out of elevators, until they arrived in a large office whose walls were almost papered with communicators and information lights. Here, at an administrator's desk, sat Vozhdov.

"Mr. Hesketh to see you, sir," Walters said.

The commodore shot a file of papers into a pass-to-you and swung around in his seat. He indicated chairs. Hesketh sat uncomfortably, because his was a good six inches higher than the acceleration bunks he was used to.

"Well, you've become a pretty important man, Mr. Hesketh," Vozhdov began, frowning. "I reported your rescue to headquarters and it is anxious to know everything you can tell us as soon as possible. Of course, we'll have to have it all analyzed eventually, but it'll be two weeks before we get you to a proper set of computers, so we'll have to make the best of what we've got."

"I don't understand," said Hesketh.

VOZHDOV seemed genuinely surprised. "No? I thought it was clear enough. Look at it this way: never before have we actually got someone back from Charnog custody — someone who's observed them at first hand. Direct

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information about them is worth hauling a Class B cruiser out of the battle line and sending it back to Base under emergency overdrive. Which is what we've done. Because of you—" Vozhdov glanced at his watch — "four thousand-odd fighting men and one of the second most powerful ships in our fleet are heading away from a developing battle, and have been for eighteen hours. Maybe you see now how important you are."

"This ship?" said Hesketh. Then he added hastily, not wanting to appear foolish, "It is a ship, isn't it, not a planetary base?"

Vozhdov was momentarily at a loss for words. With a glance at him, Walters filled the breach.

"Things have changed quite a bit since your day, Hesketh," he said. "It *is* a ship, of course. Since we got the Sun Ping drive twenty years ago, there's just about no limit to what we can put aloft. We could move planets around, I guess, if we wanted."

Hesketh didn't respond. Walters made a grimace and shrugged.

"All right," said Vozhdov heavily. "You know what your knowledge means to us, Hesketh. You're the one thing that's better than a live Charnog for our purposes. You're unique. You're invaluable. You're indispensable. Understand?"

Hesketh, feeling it was expected of him, nodded. Then he said, "Well —" and tried desperately to think of something he could say about his captors. "They slither," he suggested hopefully. "I used to hear them going down the passage outside when they fed me."

"Yes, we know they slither," agreed Vozhdov patiently. "We've deduced that much from studying their anatomy. But that's not what we want. We can't keep a Charnog alive in captivity long enough to study its way of thinking — its psychology, in short. And we need badly to know about that."

"They kept me warm," said Hesketh. "It was warmer there than it is here. And they gave me water in the sink in the corner. There was a tap I had to turn."

"That's interesting. They must have had to develop a new technique for that," said Walters slowly. "We know water's corrosive to them. But I guess we must have know that for fifty years."

Vozhdov snorted. "All right. Fact one: they went to a lot of bother to keep Hesketh alive. But we could have guessed that from the fact that he's here now. Anything else?"

"How about air?" asked Walters.

"Yes, there was air," said Hesketh. "How else do you think I could have breathed?"

WALTERS wasn't used to hearing anyone address a commodore in that manner; he looked

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righteous and indignant. Vozhdov glared at him and spoke patiently to Hesketh. "How was the air provided?"

Hesketh shrugged. "It was always there. I don't know where it came from. I couldn't look."

"They probably piped him in oxygen through the old storage tank inlet," said Walters. "But that was all. I got a whiff of the atmosphere in that room, sir. It *stank!*"

"And we were flushing the tunnels with oxygen, anyway, to kill off the survivors." Vozhdov grunted. "They fed you, too, didn't they?"

"Yes. Regularly." Hesketh's stomach was still upset. He put emphasis on the second word.

"Ah!" said Vozhdov. "How often? Maybe from that we can deduce the rotation period of their home world. That could be valuable." He looked at Hesketh expectantly.

"Every twelve hours," said Hesketh. "Exactly, every twelve hours."

THE other two slumped in disappointment.

"They must have noted the rotation period of the watch he had on him," Walters complained. "I saw it was still going when we brought him aboard. Hadn't gained or lost more than a few minutes, at the most, in all those years."

"Which *had* it done?" demanded Vozhdov.

Walters looked apologetic. "Sorry, sir. I *did* notice, as it happens — compared it with my own. It had lost eight minutes and a few seconds."

"Mm. Well, I suppose the mere fact he was allowed to keep his watch is *something*," Vozhdov allowed grudgingly. "Anything else, Hesketh?"

"No, I can't think of anything."

"You mean you were taken straight to that place immediately you were captured, and they left you locked in and never so much as looked at you again?" By the time Vozhdov finished, he was almost shouting; Hesketh's new adjustment to ordinary voice levels gave way, and he barely heard the last few words.

"That can't be right, sir," said Walters. "As I recall, there's a gap of about seven months between his ship being reported missing and the time he says his captivity started. He couldn't have been in the survival capsule all that time. His supplies, even allowing for the fact that he was on his own, wouldn't have lasted him past a month, or six weeks at the ouside. And he was quite definite about the time he'd been in the cell, and his watch was working."

"Okay, Mr. Hesketh," said Vozhdov bluntly. "What happened to you in those seven months?"

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HESKETH frowned. "I don't remember," he said. "It was a long time ago."

"Well, surely you remember how you *got* there?"

"Oh, yes! When the ship blew up, I got into the capsule. I was lucky."

"*That's* not when your luck started!" said Walters bitterly. "It started when I blew the lock on your cell!"

"Lieutenant!" said Vozhdov sharply, and Walters subsided, looking mutinous. "Mr. Hesketh, we appreciate you've been through a great ordeal, believe me. We realize we're asking a lot of you. But it's only because you have a lot to give. It's of the utmost importance to your race that you should remember."

"It was a long time ago."

"This is like talking to the air!" said Vozhdov. "What did Shu say about this, Walters?"

"He said Hesketh was in remarkably good shape, all things considered."

"Well, take this man back with my compliments and inform Dr. Shu that he didn't consider everything. I've promised victory—practically — on the strength of getting this prisoner back, and I'm going to look pretty silly if we're wasting our time. And so are you."

Walters got up and beckoned that Hesketh should do the same, and they retraced their steps to the hospital. Walters did not talk during the trip; he merely strolled along looking as if he could see a citation for distinguished service retreating from him under overdrive.

"Well, Doc?" Walters inquired. "Do you think the Charnogs managed to get into his mind and seal it off?"

"I doubt it," said the quiet little doctor, when he had finished checking Hesketh briefly. "What's more likely is that during his captivity he has repressed some unpleasant memories. I think the commodore is trying to rush matters. Give him a day or two to get used to the idea that he's human and not completely alone. Then some of the barriers may break down."

"So what do you recommend we do?"

Shu chewed his lower lip for a moment. "Why not show him the ship and introduce him to as many of the crew as possible? And you might — but warn me before you do this — you might take him to a survival capsule and show him that it's not really a Charnog prison cell, but a means of escape."

"Doctor," said Hesketh suddenly, "is there somewhere I could be alone for a bit?"

"Yes, certainly," Shu nodded. "I've assigned you a cabin right next door to sick quarters. Number 421. Come along and I'll show you where it is. My office is just a

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couple of doors along, so if you need me at any time, you only have to look in, and if I'm not there, one of the orderlies will be. You see, this is —"

Hesketh went into the cabin and closed the door.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Walters. "He doesn't even seem grateful that we hauled him out of that hole!"

"We probably haven't given him much to feel grateful for, so far," said Shu mildly. "Don't rush him. It's a miracle that he's as sane as he is, you know."

"Well, you're the expert," said Walters. "All right."

THE cabin wasn't bad. There was only one bunk, but it was on the correct side for his taste, and there were a sink and a chair. The bunk was too high, but he didn't notice that once he had sunk down on it, for he fell immediately into a deep sleep.

He woke up again for no reason except that a period of time had passed, went to the sink, and lay down again. But something nagged him. Finally it clarified into the fact that his stomach was empty.

He swung his feet to the floor and gazed expectantly at the door panel, submerging the knowledge that there was a reason for his food not arriving. He had been waiting like a statue for a long time when there was a rap at the door.

He didn't move, because nothing else happened.

After a moment, the panel slid aside, and Walters stepped through. On seeing Hesketh, he heaved a sigh of relief.

"So you *are* here!" he said. "We were getting worried. The doc said he hadn't seen you for hours—"

"I'm hungry," said Hesketh flatly.

"Well, of course you must be. You've been alone in here for hours. Come along with me to mess and I'll introduce you to the rest of us."

"All right," said Hesketh, and got up.

As he stood aside to let Hesketh precede him, Walters caught sight of the sink by the door, and had to swallow hard before speaking again. "Uh — the proper place — didn't anybody tell you—? Never mind. This way."

The mess was full of people: faces all very much alike except for minor differences of coloring, names all very different. The combination defeated Hesketh, and the curious soon tired of staring at him.

They sat him at a table and brought a white dish containing a variety of multi-colored objects. He ignored it at first; it was different in both smell and appearance from what the Charnogs had given him.

"I thought you said you were hungry," said Walters in surprise, and Hesketh, copying the actions of others sitting not far from him,

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took something from the plate which looked less outrageous than the rest and stuffed it into his mouth. The taste was unpleasant, but he got it down.

"Something—to drink?" he asked Walters, who was watching his actions with unconcealed wonder.

Walters brightened, and signaled a mess waiter.

"This'll make you feel better," he said when the man produced a bottle. "It's about the best we've got. All the way from Earth."

Something pale yellow and translucent arrived in a glass set before Hesketh. After a pause, he picked it up doubtfully. "This—this isn't water," he said.

"You darned right it's not! That's our best white wine. Try it — it's *good*." Walters leaned forward encouragingly.

Sickly, Hesketh set the glass down. How to explain that in his personal cosmos there was only one fluid at all besides water, and that it was this color? "No, I haven't drunk anything but water for — for a long time. Maybe I'd better not."

WALTERS looked relieved to find there was an apparently rational explanation for Hesketh's peculiar actions.

"I guess you may be right at that," he agreed. "That stuff is pretty strong. All right, waiter — a glass of water instead."

The food quieted Hesketh's stomach and he got through the meal without further difficulty. Then Walters took him off for a tour of the ship.

"How about starting with the drive room?" he suggested, and so they started with the drive room — a vast place full of tame energies that slept and sometimes crackled into wakefulness in gigantic insulated spheres.

"That's the Sun Ping drive, of course," said Walters. "Like I told you, it could move planets if we wanted it to."

Then they went to armaments.

"There's a Charnog name stamped on every one of these missiles," said Walters, "if they use names. Do they?"

"I don't think they talk," said Hesketh, "so they probably don't have names."

Walters shrugged. "Comes to the same thing in the end."

Then they went to navigation.

"Charnog bases," said Walters, indicating a sweep of lights across an astral map. They glowed danger-red. "We've established the location of practically every base in this sector now. Far cry from your day, eh, Hesketh? Then we were practically fighting in the dark."

"Which — where was I?"

"Here," said Walters, and tapped a green light. "That's been green ever since the day we rescued you. Pretty soon now, they'll all be green — with your help."

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"Take me back to my cabin, please," said Hesketh.

"Let's finish our tour," Walters said, and dragged Hesketh off to the servicing shops, and the administrative section, and the troop landing locks, and the planetary boat section, and the recreation rooms, and . . .

Hesketh lost count.

Eventually he found himself back in Vozhdov's office, and the heavy-faced officer was throwing questions at him.

"You already asked me that," said Hesketh firmly. "I told you I couldn't remember."

Vozhdov frowned and sent for Dr. Shu.

"This is getting us nowhere," he declared in anoyance.

Shu shook his head. "Commodore, put yourself in his position. For twenty-eight years, Hesketh has had to think of himself as a unique individual. You can't expect him to re-establish racial identification all at once. His subconscious hasn't been troubled with problems of survival in all this time. Eventually it will come to equate personal advantage with racial advantage again, and then we'll see the barriers begin to crumble."

VOZHDOV turned to Walters. "Has he made any friends yet among the crew?"

Walters grimaced. "I don't think he's interested. I doubt if he gives a damn even about me."

"I was thinking that by this time he would at least have started to identify," Shu muttered. "Still, this is a unique case—"

"I suppose he *does* know something of value to us?" Vozhdov put in.

"Almost certainly," said Shu. "After all, in those missing seven months, you can bet your life the Charnogs were doing their utmost to get the information *they* wanted out of him. So—"

"Do you think they got it?" Vozhdov cut in.

"Possibly." Shu shrugged. "In which case, there may be a subconscious element of guilt involved. If he was aware he was being useful to the enemy, he may regard himself as a traitor. Such an idea is certainly repulsive enough to account for the repression of his memories."

"But surely we have the techniques to eliminate repressions of that kind?" Walters commented.

Shu gave a vigorous nod. "Of course! But to try and break down his mental armor by force would remove the props on which his stability depends now. He's had a long time to get used to them, remember. We might find ourselves with an insane man on our hands."

"So we go on waiting," said Vozhdov.

"Exactly."

Into the silence which followed that remark broke a small but in-

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sistent buzz. Vozhdov flipped a switch on his desk.

"Listening."

"Unidentified vessel on approach course at extreme limit of detector range, sir," said an impersonal voice. "Fifteen forward by eight down by a hundred and six. I'm putting a plot of the course on your screen."

A brilliant blue curve sprang into life on a plastic plate inset in the desk top; Vozhdov studied it for a moment and said, "Action stations yellow." Then, over his shoulder to the others, "Get out of here."

They went.

"You'd better nip along, Walters," said Shu. "I'll take Hesketh with me. His cabin is close to sick quarters."

SOMEWHERE in a tangle of twisting passages, they heard a PA speaker cough into life, and it said, "Hear this! Charnog cruiser on approach course, twelve forward by nine O five down by a hundred one. Action stations red."

Shu broke into a run and Hesketh had to keep up.

"What — what's happening?" he gasped.

"What do you think? On a course like that, it's coming in to the attack, obviously." Shu skidded agilely around a corner. "I hope it's a small one. This far behind the front line, it probably is. Most likely a scout—"

Another speaker boomed down another corridor: "Attack imminent! Attack imminent!"

Something clicked in Hesketh's mind and he stopped in his tracks. "Capsule," he said under his breath. "Capsule — where's a *capsule?*"

On the last word, his voice rose to a cry, but Shu had gone around a corner, out of sight. Hesketh's last despairing wail was lost on the air.

He stood at an intersection, turning indecisively from one passage to another. His limbs and face trembled uncontrollably; sweat started out on his forehead and dripped into his eyes.

There was a *thump* that shifted the entire ship on its longitudinal axis, and he lost his footing and keeled over. His head struck the hard square corner of the wall, and for a few minutes he lay unconscious.

When he recovered, blood was mingling with the sweat in his eyes and his mind was clouded by an intolerable ache. He pulled himself to his feet and looked around. Nothing seemed visibly changed; whatever damage that gigantic blow had done, it was not in this area.

A number painted clearly on a door attracted his notice. There was a familiar look about it, and he remembered he had a cabin, with a number. All these were in the seven hundreds and no use to him. Cabin 421 — that was it.

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Someone was coming at a run. He glanced in both directions, saw the owner of the pounding footsteps cross the corridor in which he stood.

"Where's cabin 421?" he yelled.

The man barely paused in his haste. "Down three decks — blue companionway — third intersection — fifth right, third left!"

And he was gone.

Hesketh tried to order his confused memory of the man's directions. He started off at random, and after a few paces came to the blue companionway. He went down, clinging to the rail.

Three intersections—or was that decks?

Even the jumbled memories ran out on him before he came to the end of the companionway and it turned red. Spots danced before his eyes, sometimes shifting to make the outline of the figure 421 and sometimes transposing themselves into 412 or 214 and sometimes just blurring his sight. His pulse was beginning to race, and from time to time the left-hand wall of the corridor he was following met him head on.

Someone rounded a corner and bumped into him. "You all right, pal?" a voice queried.

Desperately, Hesketh formed the words. "Cabin 421, please?"

"Sick quarters? D deck, turn right and second left and it's straight in front of you. Can't miss it."

The man was gone.

Hesketh wandered a little further. Someone else appeared. Hesketh croaked his question: "Cabin 421, please?"

"This is four-one-two," said the man, jerking his arm out. He was wriggling his head into a battle-vision helmet and did not notice Hesketh's condition. "But if you're looking for Duhé, he's at his post in gunnery right now."

STAGGERING, Hesketh tried the door the man had indicated. It was locked. Focusing his eyes with an effort, he made out that its number was 412, and turned indignantly to ask what the man had meant. But he was gone.

"Hear this," said the PA system again. "Damage report. We were hit astern of the port nose gunnery compartment by a large resonator. It failed to vibrate and—"

Realization of what the impact had meant burst in Hesketh's mind. He stared wildly left and right for the red-painted door which indicated the entrance to a survival capsule, saw none, and crumpled into a ball, trying to drive the memories newly awakening back into the depths of his mind.

"—contained the damage," continued the PA system, unmindful of Hesketh. "The raider is falling astern and steering erratically after two direct hits. That is all."

Hesketh was still in his fetal po-

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sition when he heard slow footsteps, doubled, making heavy work of the going. He maneuvered his eyes cautiously.

Two armored orderlies were approaching, bearing between them a stretcher on which lay a badly injured man, his blood staining his blanket.

Getting to his feet unsteadily, Hesketh said, "Cabin 421, please?"

The first of the orderlies gazed at him in astonishment. "Who the devil sent you down to sick quarters on your own feet in *that* state? Come along with us!"

He fell in obediently behind them, but as they entered the hospital corridor, he caught sight of the number he had been hunting for and dashed past them. As soon as the cabin door was safely slammed behind him, he flung himself face down on the bunk.

What was happening to him? This giddiness, this racing pulse, profuse sweating, this feeling of — something — neither fullness nor emptiness nor pressure, unlike any sensation his stomach had given him in all those years?

For endless ages, he lay without daring to move, moaning at intervals. Then the door opened and Dr. Shu stepped in, followed by a nurse carrying a sterilizer and dressings.

"What's up with you, Hesketh?" the doctor inquired. "My orderlies said you looked pretty bad."

Hesketh half-rolled on his side and gave a gasp. It could have been a word: "Help!"

Shu's professional fingers searched the bloody scalp. "A scratch," he said, and added to the nurse, "Doesn't need a dressing. Just clean it up."

"My — my guts," moaned Hesketh, and Shu frowned. He took a culture disc from a sterile case and slapped it briskly on the skin of Hesketh's forearm, took it away, slid it under the objective of a pocket diagnostician. He whistled.

"Here, eat this," he said, clicking a pill from a dispenser. "It'll put you right in no time. All you've got is a common cold. I suppose, being in a pretty sterile climate, you've lost a lot of your resistances. But a cold is all it is."

Hesketh got the tasteless pill down somehow, and Shu turned back toward the door.

"Don't leave me!" Hesketh begged.

"Listen, Hesketh, I've got sixty men in sick quarters that we picked out of the wreck of the nose gunnery section. I've done everything you need, and I can't waste time holding your hand!" Then his face softened a bit. "I suppose it's encouraging that you don't want to be alone any more. Don't worry, that pill will fix you up in about six hours—"

A voice bellowed through the door: Vozhdov's. "Shu, what the

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hell are you doing in there? You should be operating on Gurra Singh!"

"Yes, Commodore," said Shu, turning away again. "They're putting him under anesthetic now."

HESKETH couldn't remember the last time he had felt ill. Now the virus drove him swiftly into delirium and exhausted coma, from which he awoke much weakened and with his head buzzing with new memories. They made him cry out and open his eyes, to find an orderly standing by his bed.

"You should be okay now, Mr. Hesketh," the man said. "Will you come through and see the doc in his office, please?"

"No," said Hesketh, and turned over.

Bewildered, the man withdrew, but in a few moments he was back, accompanied this time by Vozhdov and Shu. The commodore stood glowering in the background while the doctor carried out a perhaps deliberately undeft examination. Then he stepped back, peeling off sterile gloves.

"He'll do," he said in a voice that sounded terribly tired. "Fever's gone and the infection's under control."

"All right!" Vozhdov came forward. "You listening, *Mister* Hesketh?"

Hesketh made no reply.

Vozhdov could contain himself no longer. "Whether you want to listen or not, you're going to!" he exploded. "I've had just about all I can take from you! It's no damn good thinking that just because you're unique and important you can keep us hanging about for your private likes and dislikes. We've just lost forty good men to a Charnog attack, and the doc's fighting to keep a dozen more alive. You know enough about the Charnogs to win the war, and we're going to win it regardless of what you want!"

Shu was shaking his head tiredly, in a gesture of warning, but Vozhdov turned fiercely on him. "Enough of that! Walters! Come in here instead of standing like a jackass in the passage! I told you to get this man interested in what was going on—"

"Sir," said Walters defensively, "I tried my best. I just couldn't get through to him."

"Well, take him up and show him the corpses and the wreckage in nose gunnery! If that doesn't remind him he's a human being with a duty to his race, we'll remind him the hard way! All right, Hesketh," he finished in a lower tone, "get on your feet and go with Walters."

Blindly, but recognizing the authority in the tone, Hesketh did so.

"IT seems to me," said Walters bitterly, as they funneled up an access corridor half-blocked with scattered equipment, "you

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care more for the bastards who cooped you up than you do for your own species! I knew these guys they're hauling out of there frozen stiff and torn to pieces. They were good friends of mine. Look!"

Walters caught the shoulder of a masked and armored man, swinging him around to show what he was bearing in his arms: a leg, a hand and a head that did not match each other.

"Your friends the Charnogs did that, Hesketh — understand?"

The armored man pulled away and went on down the corridor with his ghastly load.

Watching him depart, Hesketh felt a stir of sickness again. "What — exactly — happened?"

"That's better. Come through the lock and I'll show you."

There was a guard at the lock, which had been cut through the air-seal around the damaged section; Walters explained his mission, and they were allowed to pass. Through the headphones of a spacesuit, his voice sounded oddly unfamiliar to Hesketh, but he got his meaning.

"See that big black thing in the middle of this mess?"

Hesketh's eyes were unused to sorting out the kind of confusion that faced them. He stretched out a hand and pointed at something big and black and sinister which hardly poked out from the heaps of ruined equipment. "That?"

"That. A present from your friends. Understand? A resonator with power enough to scatter this ship across half Creation. If our damper screens hadn't stopped it vibrating we'd have been blown to hell between our lines and the nearest support base. We'd have been dead ducks, and that includes you, and it would have been your pals' doing. Get it?"

Hesketh shifted uncomfortably. "It happened to me before," he said. "That must have been before I was — before I was a prisoner . . . But don't they have survival capsules any more?"

He waited anxiously for Walters' reply.

"Of course we have survival capsules. You'll see 'em all over the ship. But they're an anachronism. What would be the chance of getting to a capsule if a resonator that size actually went off? And it would take a ship like ours days to scour the area on the chance of finding someone alive — and you think they're going to search for improbable survivors when the ships could be knocking down Charnogs? Don't be a fool."

"I — I thought they could locate them by radio," Hesketh suggested.

"Oh, sure. But you have to get pretty near to a capsule before you can pick it up on a receiver, and in any case the shock of the blast often puts the radio out of action. No, a survival capsule's a waste of

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effort these days." Walters changed the subject. "Well? Seen enough? Are you going to talk now?"

"I don't know what I can *say*," pleaded Hesketh, and Walters made a disgusted gesture.

"Then we'll have to find out," he said, and led the way back from the damaged area into the body of the ship.

AS they were retracing their steps down a corridor, they passed a red-painted door, and Hesketh, startled, halted to stare at it.

"Yes, that's a survival capsule," Walters told him. "A two-man capsule like the one you got away in. *You* got away! Not like those poor guys in the gunnery section — they're all fouled up with the wreckage, aren't they?"

Unhearing, Hesketh worked the control experimentally and the door slid open. He looked inside. The design was hardly changed from the one he had known; but then Walters had said capsules were an anachronism, and who bothers to improve an anachronism?

"Satisfied?" said Walters bitingly after a long pause.

Hesketh closed the door again reluctantly.

"Take me back to my cabin, please," he requested, and Walters struck out down the passage toward sick quarters. But when Hesketh came within sight of cabin 421 and started eagerly to it, he was surprised to find his arm gripped.

"Not so fast," said Walters between his teeth. "You're coming into the doc's office first."

"But — why? I'm all right now — my cold's gone—" Protesting, Hesketh tried to struggle loose, but Walters was skilled at frog-marching, and willy-nilly Hesketh found himself being forced toward the doctor's door.

Inside, they found Vozhdov sitting beside the doctor's desk, countersigning forms as the doctor filled them in. They looked up when Walters and Hesketh came in.

"Well?" Vozhdov demanded. "Did that straighten him up?"

"Not that I can see, sir," said Walters. "All he's interested in is survival capsules."

"Womb retreat," said Shu softly, and completed another form. "Hesketh, down here we've been watching men die while you've been out. These are their death certificates I'm making out. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Please let me go to my cabin," said Hesketh. "I feel all right now."

"That does it!" snapped Vozhdov. "Shu, we're not waiting. There's knowledge in this man's mind that we must have, and you're going to get at it. That's an order."

Shu looked too weary to protest.

"Serov! Quincatlan!" Vozhdov called, and two orderlies hurried into the office. "Take this man

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through to the operating theater. The doctor will tell you what to do with him."

Hesketh's arms were pinioned, and he was forced across the floor to a different door from the one by which he had entered. As soon as he saw what was beyond, he began to scream. But he was laid out on a hard surgical bench, and a needle pricked his arm.

A certain calm came over him; he stopped screaming, and his pulse quietened. But, inside, he cowered away from his own eyes for fear of what they might be going to show him.

Vozhdov took a chair and sat down close to the table. Shu gave quiet commands to his orderlies, who wheeled in machines and attached suction-cup terminals to Hesketh's temples and scalp.

"Why was he screaming?" asked Vozhdov.

Shu passed a hand across his forehead. "I imagine it was because this is what happened to him before."

"You mean when the Charnogs had him? Well, what difference can that make? This time he's helping his own race, isn't he?"

"Logic like that doesn't necessarily appeal to the subconscious," said Shu, and there was something in his voice that suggested it might not appeal to him either. But he continued his preparations.

A metronome with a tiny light glowing at the end of its vertical pendulum was set to ticking over Hesketh's forehead, and the stimulus touched off another scream. And another. And another.

A further prick of a needle and there was darkness.

HE awoke to find himself back on the bunk in his cabin, with Shu sitting asleep on a chair beside him. The shock of waking brought him bolt upright, staring wildly around for signs of the hypnotist's equipment which had been used on him.

The doctor stirred and opened his eyes.

"Don't worry, Hesketh. It's over for the moment."

Hesketh relaxed, but his watchful eyes were on Shu's face, like those of a trapped animal studying its captor.

"I'm sorry," Shu went on inadequately, "but it has to be done. You've been screaming — did you know?"

Hesketh realized his throat was raw and harsh. He tried to speak and found it painful.

"Drink this — it'll ease the soreness," Shu offered, and reached for a glass of white liquid standing on the edge of the sink. Hesketh took it warily, as if in no mood to trust it, but when he tried it, it did relieve the pain.

He gave the glass back with a mutter of thanks.

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"I don't like what we're having to do," Shu said. "Do you understand that? But — well, when the Charnogs captured you, they must have examined you, and studied you, and learned a lot from you. You couldn't have helped it. The mere fact that you were a living, breathing human being told them perhaps more than they'd known before about us. By a million-to-one chance, we got you back safely. And —" He spread his hands helplessly. "I'd rather have left you alone till you came to of your own accord. It would have happened. But they say they need what you can tell us right away, and the commodore has ordered me to—"

"Is there going to be more?" asked Hesketh.

"Yes, I'm afraid there is. We're trying to locate the memories of a few short months a good many years ago, and you've hidden them from yourself so well, it may take quite a long time for us to find them all." Shu found he could no longer face the burning intensity of Hesketh's gaze, and had to look at the blankness of the wall.

The door opened; an orderly looked in and said, "Commodore Vozhdov's compliments, Doctor, and he's ready for another session."

"Did you tell him I said Hesketh wasn't?" Shu replied without turning his head.

"Yes, sir. He said he was tired of waiting for Hesketh."

"All right." The doctor got to his feet. Hesketh was staring at him accusingly. "Damn it, Hesketh! I wish there was another way!"

"I know you do," said Hesketh surprisingly. "Where's—Vozhdov?"

"In the operating theater, I presume." Shu indicated that Hesketh should leave the cabin in front of him, and they went out.

Vozhdov was indeed in the theater; he was pacing up and down impatiently. As the doctor entered, he snapped, "Where have you been? We've wasted enough time already on this!"

Hesketh surveyed the room silently. It was as it had been before. The metronome was ready to start its ticking above his forehead, driving him into a trance. Deliberately, he picked up the heavy object and threw it at Vozhdov.

IT hit the commodore in the chest, and the blow was followed by a moment of total astonished silence. Then Vozhdov reacted.

"Why, you treacherous little—"

His fist was already swinging for Hesketh's face when Shu leaped forward. He wasn't quite quick enough; he took the full force of the blow and staggered back across the room, holding his shoulder where it had been struck.

"If you do that again, Commodore," he said as soon as he had mastered the pain, "I shall forward a confidential report on your be-

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havior to Base and have you relieved of your command."

"What did you say?" the commodore demanded incredulously.

"You heard." Shu rubbed his aching shoulder. "If necessary, I'll have you certified psychologically unfit. I think the staff will uphold my ruling when I tell them you endangered the sanity of the most valuable man alive. Now do you think you're going to be able to control yourself, or do I have to order you out of here?"

"But—" Vozhdov seemed unable to believe his ears. "But you saw what he did!"

"Of course I saw," said Shu in icy, cutting tones. "And it was fully justified."

Hesketh, finally comprehending the situation, suddenly gave the little quiet-spoken doctor a smile. "I like you!" he said.

Shu managed a tired grin in response. "You aren't going to like me much longer," he answered. "Lie down, will you?"

Hesketh hesitated, looking at Vozhdov. Scowling, the commodore composed himself enough to take his seat, and Hesketh climbed irresolutely on the table.

Then the metronome was set going and it all started again.

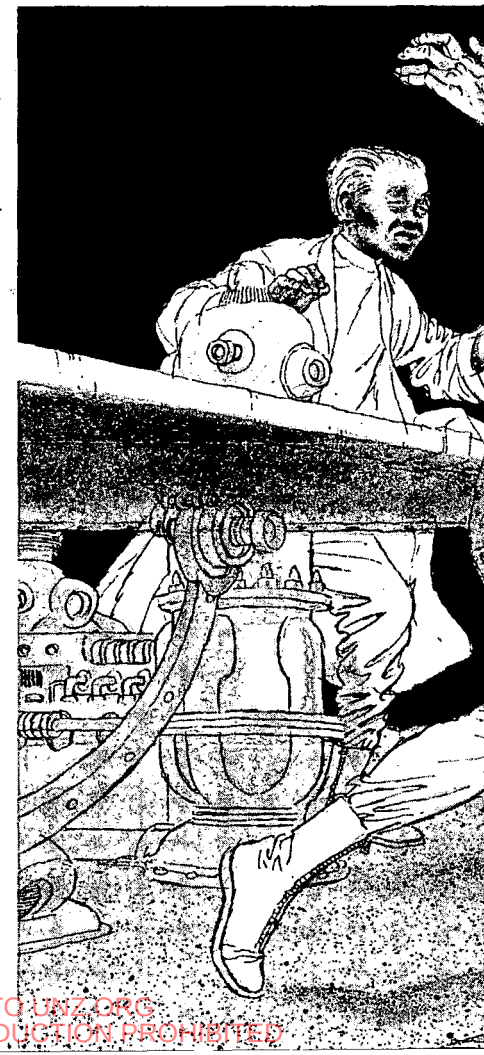
He awoke this time to find himself still in the theater. Vozhdov was speaking, rubbing his hands together delightedly.

"So we're getting somewhere! I told you we would, didn't I?"

Hesketh rolled his head to look at Shu, who wore a sick expression.

"Yes, we're getting somewhere," the doctor admitted. "I'm not sure it's very reassuring news, though."

"Doesn't matter," shrugged Vozhdov. "Base will be delighted



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to get it. It'll upset them to learn they've been underestimating the Charnogs' knowledge of human psychology for so long, but they need a bit of shaking up."

"Oh, go ahead and make your report," said Shu. "There'll probably be a promotion to follow."

Vozhdov's satisfied smile vanished like frost in sunlight. "What did you say, Dr. Shu?"

The doctor didn't seem to hear, but went on as if to himself. "That is, if Hesketh gets to Base with his mind in one piece . . ."

He suddenly noticed that Hes-

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keth's eyes were open, and hurried up to the table. "Here," he said solicitously, "take my arm and I'll get you back to your cabin."

"Couldn't you send an orderly for that?" asked Vozhdov.

"I *could*," said Shu, helping Hesketh to the floor, and left it at that.

STUMBLING, Hesketh reached his bunk and collapsed onto it. Shu stood over him with pitying eyes.

"They must have treated you damned badly," he said. "Almost as badly as we're going to . . . But then they had ignorance as an excuse."

When he left, Hesketh lay still. He found he was beginning to remember: a ticking bright thing at the edge of his field of vision — which was not Shu's metronome; something attached to his scalp — which was not Shu's encephalograph. He was recalling voices that had spoken to him, hard, hard to understand — artificial.

When he slept, it was with nightmares.

They came for him when he was barely awake, and after that things settled into a standard cycle: trance, wakening with his throat raw, a brief interlude of thinking consciousness, and a period of oblivion which he reached for as blessed comfort.

"How can he be so indifferent about the Charnogs, after what they must have done to him?" demanded Vozhdov at the end of one of the sessions.

"What good would hate have been to him for twenty-eight years?" said Shu. "He couldn't do anything."

"He could at least have looked forward to escape."

"Escape! How long would *you* hang onto that hope?"

"Well, why can't he feel angry now that he *has* been rescued?" pressed the commodore, and Shu gave him a short, cold look.

"He's beginning to feel angry again, I assure you."

"Good!" said the commodore, and Shu saw that the point of the remark was lost on him.

The sessions continued. Each one left a clearer mind in Hesketh's head. As Shu had stated, he was beginning to feel angry again, but that wasn't all.

After a later session, he looked at the little doctor curiously. "You really don't like doing this, do you?" he said with a hint of wonder in his voice.

"I hate it," said Shu passionately.

"Don't worry," Hesketh said. "It won't be going on much longer."

Surprised, Shu stared at him. "How can you tell? Are you beginning to remember consciously, as well as unconsciously? I wish you could — then we could just question you, instead of having to dig in your mind this way."

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"It won't be much longer now," repeated Hesketh, cursing himself for having already said too much. But he couldn't stop himself. "I—I escaped twice, you know."

"Of course you did," said Shu. "Once from the wreck of a ship and once from the Charnog base."

"No," said Hesketh, and frowned. "That wasn't escape, was it? When Walters came and got me, I mean."

"Strictly speaking, it wasn't," Shu agreed. "It was a rescue, not an escape."

"That's what I meant," said Hesketh, and Shu looked puzzled.

Yes, certainly, Hesketh thought to himself. *I escaped twice. I really did escape twice.*

"Well," said Shu at length, "however long it takes now, the worst of it is over."

HESKETH was perfectly well aware that the worst of it was over. But what remained was pretty bad, too, and without the new clarity that had overtaken his mind, he would have succumbed to what was done to him. As it was, he continued to struggle, though he submitted readily enough now to the continuing routine: trance, wakefulness, slumber, trance . . .

Progress grew very slow. Locked deep, deep in the lowest levels of Hesketh's subconscious, were things which his mind had overlaid protectively with layer upon layer of defensive repressions. Memories of what had actually been done to him came back comparatively quickly, although they lacerated his mind in so doing, but what was hidden below them was much more important — memories of things he had himself done involuntarily, and of his reactions to them.

Each recollection was unearthed more slowly than the previous one, and Vozhdov's impatience grew daily.

The time came when it flared up and he shouted at Shu. "We're only two days from Base now and you still haven't cleaned out that data in his mind! What are they going to say when they—"

"Exactly," said Shu, his eyes like steel. "You're afraid Hesketh won't earn you a promotion, after all. You're afraid they may find your insistence on rushing matters has forever deprived the human race of the knowledge buried in Hesketh's mind. It may have — I'm not qualified to say. But I do know this — if you keep on driving Hesketh the way you've done up to now, you'll finish him!"

Hesketh got stiffly off the surgical table and came across to Shu, who looked almost on the verge of hitting the commodore. "It's not as bad as that," he said comfortingly. "It's all over."

"What d'you mean?" Vozhdov, unsure of what reply to give to Shu, was pleased to switch the object of his attention.

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Hesketh gave him a look of contempt and went on addressing the doctor. "There's a way out of this. And you don't want to go on, do you?"

"If it hadn't been for *him*," said Shu, nodding at Vozhdov, "I'd never have started."

"That's what I thought. Well, come along then. Let's go to a life capsule."

Startled, Shu looked up. "You — you think maybe that kind of stimulus might bring your memory back completely now?"

"It might," said Hesketh cautiously. "Anyway, it's a way out, isn't it?"

"I don't quite follow you, but it's worth trying. Anything but what the last session's been like! Hesketh, I'm sorry — I feel as if I've been flaying you alive."

"That's all right," said Hesketh. "It was his fault, not yours."

Vozhdov purpled, but Shu silenced him with a glare. "All right, Hesketh," he said. "There's a capsule not far from here, on C deck, which will do. Try anything once . . ."

It's worked all right before, thought Hesketh.

THEY left the office together, Shu leading, Hesketh next and Vozhdov sullenly bringing up the rear. Something had cleared in Hesketh's mind; new knowledge, new purpose filled it.

They reached the capsule and he put his purpose to work.

He had never lifted a hand against Vozhdov since the time he had thrown the metronome at him, though he had often wanted to. Now he did; he swung around and brought the edge of his hand to the commodore's throat. The blow was as violent as he could make it. Vozhdov could not even cry out, for it smashed his larynx.

"What—?" cried Shu. "What for?"

Hesketh gazed at him in surprise. "I thought you understood! Well, it doesn't matter. You will in a moment. Come on!"

Shu didn't move. They dared not delay, Hesketh realized—who knew who might come past and catch them? He had to act first and explain later.

So he struck the doctor apologetically under the ear, catching him as he slumped, and dragged him through the entrance into the survival capsule, laid him tidily on the bunk he didn't want for himself, and then closed the door and activated the expulsion switch.

As soon as the capsule had been fired, Hesketh got up from the bunk where he had thrown himself and looked with satisfaction. He knew his surroundings so well that they were almost a part of him. In a sense, they were.

There was only one thing which irritated him, and that was the

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radio jutting from the wall. He tugged at it, but it was mounted too securely for him to dislodge it. He clambered onto one of the bunks and kicked downward at the radio. Wires fused as they tore loose. Then he sat down to await Shu's awakening.

In a few minutes, the little doctor stirred and moaned, and Hesketh spoke reassuringly. "It's all right now, Doc. Everything is all right."

Shu started up and looked around.

"How could I have been so stupid?" he said wonderingly. "You told me yourself you escaped twice! Once from the wreck of the transport ship, and once from the Charnogs — only the Charnogs recaptured you — and each time you came to equate escape with a survival capsule. So you naturally made your third escape the same way, this time from us."

He began to laugh. "Well, everything's clear now. You're out of Vozhdov's hands for good. Base'll send out ships to pick us up. It won't take them long to track down our radio signal."

"Oh, no," Hesketh assured him, and pointed to the ruins of the radio. "That was the mistake I made both times, letting the capsule go on signaling. You didn't think I'd make it a *third* time, did you?"

— JOHN BRUNNER

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

NOT IN SOLITUDE by Kenneth F. Glantz. Doubleday & Co., Inc., N.Y., $3.50

NOT SINCE the unchallenged days of Capt. S. P. Meek have we had a distinguished service author than the temporarily indentured writers of WW II. But Col. Glantz, with his very first novel, erupts into front-rank prominence.

His account of the U.S. Air Force's first Martian mission, code-name "Far Venture," is an absolutely hypnotic job, utterly gripping and minutely credible. May Col. Glantz pilot his writing desk for a long time to come.

Rating: ★★★★★

THE ENEMY STARS by Poul Anderson. J. B. Lippincott Co., Phila. & N.Y., $2.95

SOME AUTHORS have the touch that makes even their potboilers into thoroughly presentable items. Unfortunately, Anderson is not in this class. However, top-notch Anderson is truly tops — and this is Anderson at his peak.

In truth, *The Enemy Stars* is more a descendant of Melville and Conrad than of the epics of Smith and Campbell. It concerns space-wreck, but, far more than that, it

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concerns itself with the reactions to disaster of four completely dissimilar individuals.

Why did men go to sea and why will men go to space? Anderson has an answer, and a good one. So good that, if not for some loose ends left dangling, it would have received five stars.

Rating: ★★★★

A MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY by Ray Bradbury. Doubleday & Co., N.Y., $3.75

REGARDLESS OF the outer wrapping or inner core of his story, Bradbury's touch breathes fantasy into his most prosaic items. So, though few of the 22 — 22 count them 22 — shorts qualify as science fiction, all have an intense emotional impact.

"The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit" is a yarn of pure magic woven from simple cloth, while "Dark They Were, and Golden-eyed" is a Martian Chronicle from the master's Red Planet period.

Rating: ★★★★

FIRE IN THE HEAVENS by George O. Smith. Avalon Books, N.Y., $2.75

THE AVERAGE Avalon novel is pleasant to take and easy to digest. Smith follows the recipe carefully in cooking up an intriguing nova theory.

His instrument-maker hero detects an error in the law of conservation of energy. At the same time, a physicist discovers a jet that draws power from nowhere, and the sun is found to be going nova. Smith blends these conflicting ingredients neatly together just before the curdling point.

Rating: ★★★

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Anthony Boucher. Doubleday & Co., Inc., N.Y., $3.75

IF OUR school system had never been indicted before, C. M. Kornbluth's fictional brief more than makes up the lack. "Theory of Rocketry" is a social document with all of its frightening roots in today.

Two delightful changes of pace are Alfred Bester's "The Men Who Murdered Mohammed" and Avram Davidson's "The Grantham Sightings," tongue-in-cheek excursions into fanciful fact.

The remaining stories are fair to good.

Rating: ★★★+

STARHAVEN by Ivar Jorgenson. Avalon Books, N.Y., $2.75

ALTHOUGH THE author's premise is acceptable — a shielded world established to offer sanctuary to hunted criminals — his laxity in creating a credible background is impossible to forgive.

The planet's despot, singlehandedly responsible for its existence,

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is kept tiresomely naive for the author's convenience in plotting.

Some of the gadgetry is interesting.

Rating: ★★

NINE TOMORROWS by Isaac Asimov. Doubleday & Co., Inc., N.Y., $3.50

WITH THIS admirable volume, eminent biochemist Asimov is well into his second score of published books.

Even though he is amazingly prolific for a writer with a steady job, few other authors can claim his consistently high level of excellence.

Two pointed cases are the novelets of the collection, "Profession" and "The Ugly Little Boy." The latter appeared in GALAXY as "Lastborn."

Rating: ★★★★+

ZIP-ZIP GOES TO VENUS by John M. Schealer. E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., N.Y., $2.75

ZIP-ZIP, the Martian boy, zips when he talks in order to release psycho-galvanic energy, because English is so easy to think and talk. He's also a dynamo in tight spots, as he demonstrates in this high-adventure yarn of his trip to Venus with the Riddle kids from Earth.

A Never-Never Land of Space, with an interplanetary Peter Pan, for youngsters.

Rating: ★★★★

PAPERBACK NEWS

ACE BOOKS: *Ring Around the Sun,* Clifford D. Simak, 35¢. Simak's wonderful novel of parallel worlds, first serialized in GALAXY, is worth rereading . . . *Beyond the Vanishing Point,* Ray Cummings; *The Secret of Zi,* Kenneth Bulmer; Ace Double, 35¢. The Cummings is the creaking prototype of *The Incredible Shrinking Man,* while *Zi* alternates extremely good with excrutiatingly bad writing in a rapid-fire tale of rebellion against alien rule . . . *Threshold of Eternity,* John Brunner; *The War of Two Worlds,* Poul Anderson; Ace Double, 35¢. Brunner has the vast imagination of van Vogt — along with the same addiction to bewildering plots. Anderson's minor effort is about the manipulation of Earth and Mars into a senseless attritive war by form-changing outworlders.

AVON BOOKS: *Doomsday Morning,* C. L. Moore, 35¢. A fine story of intrigue in an America controlled by Comus, a vast communications complex . . . *Cry Horror,* H. P. Lovecraft, 35¢. A collection of typical Lovecrafty chillers titled *The Lurking Fear* in the original Arkham House edition. Do not gulp in one sitting unless HPL is your dish . . . *BR-R-R!,* Groff Conklin, 35¢. Another terror collection, this one untypical. Conklin's anthology is br-r-r-ed mainly by Theodore Sturgeon's deserved-

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ly famous "It" and H. L. Gold's undeservedly neglected squirmer called "Warm, Dark Places."

BALLANTINE BOOKS: *After the Rain,* John Bowen, 35¢. Britain's angry young SF men are cataclysmic as well. But Harold Mead, Edmund Cooper and now newcomer John Bowen each has something fresh to offer aside from doom. Bowen's story of survival struggel on a Kon-Tiki-type raft is hard-hitting, with bitingly satiric touches for added discomfort . . . *The Tide Went Out,* Charles Eric Maine, 35¢. Maine joins the select group above with this superior job, comparable in quality to his *High Vacuum,* in which bomb tests open earth rifts through which the oceans go down the drain — along with civilization.

GOLD MEDAL BOOKS: *The Monster from Earth's End,* Murray Leinster, 35¢. Leinster's second for Gold Medal (*War with the Gizmos* was #1) is excellently sustained science-horror of the *Who Goes There?* school. Unknown invisible predators are loosed on an isolated island base. Many shortcomings in logic, but the expertly maintained mood of terror hides most of them.

SIGNET BOOKS: *The Demolished Man,* Alfred Bester, 35¢. If ever a book was a must, this 1951 GALAXY novel, which copped just about every award in sight, is it . . . The *Seedling Stars,* James Blish, 35¢. The provocative concept of pantropy: making men fit their planetary environments; one section originally appeared in GALAXY as "Surface Tension."

SPECIAL NOTE:

ROCKETS, MISSILES AND SPACE TRAVEL by Willy Ley. Vox Productions, N.Y.

THIS IS an event that must not be missed — a hi-fi recording of the subject with all the authenticity that only Ley can bring to it. Ley, von Braun, Dornberger, Atlas, Jupiter-C, etc., speak for themselves.

NO MORE WAR by Linus Pauling. Dodd, Mead & Co., N.Y., $3.50

THE FEARLESS Nobel Laureate who, practically alone, collected a petition from 9,000 scientists to the UN beseeching an end to H-bomb testing and a sane approach to world problems. His book tells why.

JUNIOR EDUCATION CORNER

VAN NOSTRAND'S SCIENTIFIC ENCYCLOPEDIA. D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., N.Y., $29.75

ALL THAT the title says: an exhaustive one-volume library; 1800 pages, 2 million words, 100,000 definitions and 14,000 articles. Only a specialist could ask for more.

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THERE'S ADVENTURE IN CIVIL ENGINEERING by Neil P. Ruzic.
THERE'S ADVENTURE IN METEOROLOGY, by Neil P. Ruzic.
THERE'S ADVENTURE IN ROCKETS by Julian May.
Popular Mechanics Press, Chicago, $2.95 *each*
THE LATEST three in the excellent school-age series featuring Randy Morrow in a novel and novel-like approach to learning about various fields.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S BOOK OF SCIENCE, edited by Dr. Glenn O. Blough. Whittlesey House, N.Y., $4.50
EDITOR BLOUGH has drawn on some twenty assorted science books to cover a broad field of interest: Space; The Sea; Electronics; etc. The scope is encyclopedic, but the treatment is warmly and interestingly intimate.

OTHER WORLDS IN SPACE by Terry Maloney. Sterling Pub. Co., Inc., N.Y., $2.95
EARTH'S SISTER planets and what they might be like. How Earth might appear to astronomers and what they might guess about our environment from observation. Color plates.

GUIDE TO MARS by Patrick Moore. The Macmillan Co., N.Y., $2.75
VENUS ASIDE, Mars is the most frustrating photographic subject in the Solar System. Accordingly, we've had some Martian theories that were real beauts. Moore chronicles them all, from fact (few) to fancy (many).

EXPLORING THE SUN by Ray A. Gallant. Garden City Books, N.Y., $2.50
"OUR MR. SUN," the excellent TV educational feature, might have been scripted from Gallant's equally excellent book, which is another in his king-sized series of lucid, beautifully illustrated tomes for youngsters from eight through high school age.

MATHEMATICS FOR THE LAYMAN by T. H. Ward Hill. Philosophical Library, N.Y., $4.75
BRINGS TEDIOUS problems to easy solution by use of shortcuts that are amazingly easy to acquire. An excellent tool for honing the edge of work-dulled minds.

— **FLOYD C. GALE**

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A daughter of Thomas Mann turns to science fiction — and creates this magic mountain of a story!

TRUE SELF

By ELISABETH MANN BORGESE

PRIMA Brogan was checked in.

"Your appointment?"

"Mr. Pierre, at eight-thirty."

"Your name?"

"Mrs. Brogan."

"Here it's Snyder. They probably got it spelled wrong. Go right ahead, please."

They took off her coat, also her dress. Two, three girls around her, exceedingly trim in their hospital gowns, slipped one over her head too.

They grabbed her alligator purse and dropped it into a sort of waterproof container which they fastened on the armrest of the dentist chair in which they urged her to sit.

"So it's right next to you," one explained, "but without getting singed, splashed, dyed, stiffened, or shrunk as you go along."

There were about twelve dentist chairs facing mirrors on the walls, most of them empty now. One was somewhat isolated, thronelike, with a steel ring around it on the ceiling on which a curtain was fastened like a baldachin. The curtain could be drawn to shut off the throne from the sight of the world.

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

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Prima Brogan just sat there. Soon a lady walked in, clad in a beautiful steel-blue suit with matching scarf. Everything about her was perfect: gait and posture, the fit of her high-heeled pumps, the soft flow of her platinum curls, the shape and shading of her eyes and long lashes. So early in the morning.

Her smile bared flawless teeth. "Is this your first appointment, Mrs. Brogan?" she said with a low and modest, musical and pleasing voice.

"Yes. I've never been here before."

"We hope you'll come back often." She smiled again and walked away.

Another lady walked in, no less perfect than the first. But, whereas the first was tuned in blue, the second lady's basic chord was rose. A tight dusty-rose gown buttoned down in front, with gold-red shoes and flaming hair.

She smiled her smile and said, "Would you like something to read?" Then she fastened a glass table on the armrest of the dentist chair, on which she nonchalantly dropped three or four illustrated magazines. They seemed to arrange themselves spontaneously in such a way that one could read all the titles and dates: a tastefully and studiously designed pattern. Then the lady smiled again and walked away.

THE third lady was one of those in the hospital gowns. But it was amazing what a simple belt, a tasteful pin, a bracelet falling casually from under reversed open cuffs could do. The lady had a cornflower fastened on the barrette that held her chestnut locks. She wore white satin slippers, and even if attired in a hospital gown, she was no less perfect than her two predecessors.

"Would you like anything from the bar?" she asked, and smiled as she accepted Prima's negative answer, smiled discreetly and understandingly.

In the meantime, other women began to trickle in. They were far less perfect than the ladies of the establishment. One had a run in her nylon; the other, deformed toes. The polish on the third one's nails was chipped, and the fourth shook dandruff from unkempt and oily fladous. They walked clumsily; their skin was dull, their eyes artless.

Looking at clients and operators, one might have wondered how many sittings it would take the former to achieve the perfection of the latter, or perhaps whether the operators were not simply clients who had come here often and patiently and thus acquired esthetic perfection along with the privilege of serving as operators — a privilege granted for good behavior to patients or inmates of other estab-

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lishments or institutions as well.

Having shed their clothes, donned their gowns, and secured their purses in protective custodies, the women took their places in the dentist chairs, and soon an uncouth conversation crossed the spaces between chair and chair.

"Aren't you glad you don't live on Broad Street? My word, that was terrible last night."

"I heard it over the late news. They announced it with all the details. I never heard anything like that . . ."

"I saw it in this morning's paper. What pictures! Simply gruesome. I don't know how they did it. Makes your hair stand on end."

"You know her father, poor soul, he was run over last month — Oh, you didn't know? He was a second cousin of Mrs. Barnes' brother-in-law. So I knew it all along. I wasn't surprised a bit."

A bit kept repeating itself as on a cracked record, *a bit a bit a bit bi bt,* growing muter each time, transforming itself into air bubbles rising to a water surface. The woman's head had in fact been immersed in Mr. Pierre's shampoo.

"Beauty," Mr. Pierre explained to Prima, "beauty is not something you can stick onto people; draw it; paint it on. Look at that lady there," he said, and they opened the circular curtain and rolled the woman out on a stretcher, stiff and cold. "She is dull. No sensitivity, no depth in her expression, no matter how many layers of makeup you throw there. But the lady wants — or is supposed — to look profound, sensitive, experienced. So what do I do? I drown her. In fifteen minutes, they will revive her. The usual exercises any life guard can handle. This is what Mr. Pierre's world-famous shampoo does for you. Look at the little folder."

CLEANSES RESPIRATORY ORGANS
No bellowing coughs,
no cheeping asthma.
SWEETENS YOUR BREATH
You too can have a new lease on love thanks to any of Mr. Pierre's special aromas:
Sweet Spring Libeccio
Ocean Gust — Men's Special
Ardent Thyme Zephyr
Gives You that Knowing Look
of those who have been face to face with death —
YOUR DEATH, THE SPUTNIK OF YOUR BEAUTY
We Launch and Recall Him in Her Service.
Single Application $10.00
Six Applications $40.00
Including complete checkup by our own specially trained medical advisors.

"Hello, everyone," Mrs. Firestone said, brash and nasal. She was a beanstalk of a lady, most imperfect, with dark-rimmed glasses over a glossy nose, and walked like a dragoon.

"They got him, you know. I just saw it on television. Crazy?

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You knew it all along? What the hell! They *always* say that, to keep them off the Chair. Now you saw yourself what *he* did last night. I sure hope he'll get the Chair. I hope they'll have to switch it on two or three times too. Would be too good for him just to die right off . . ."

"Would you mind stepping over here, Mrs. Firestone? Mr. Irwing will be right with you."

II

A MAN, unless he is Mr. Pierre, in his black belted blouse, with manicured hands pensively stroking his Vandyke, black, trim and pointed — a man, unless he is Mr. Frederic, Mr. Irwing, or Mr. Robert, with no face over the white gown giving off a faint odor of tobacco and eau de Cologne together with words well groomed and bleached of meaning — a man in a beauty shop is out of place. He causes a nervous hustling and rustling. The conversation halts, towels are thrown on bared legs, curtains drawn hastily, chairs turned and mirrors covered. If, at least, he veiled his intrusion with a gentle white gown. If at least, he masked his face, like the visiting fathers in the maternity ward.

But he sat there, sheer and male, in a loudly striped suit. He sat on the armrest of his girl's chair, and they looked at a fashion magazine which lay open in the girl's lap. The girl was plump, in a black jersey and gray skirt. Her stockings sagging, her heels trodden down. Her hands were stout and fat and yellow, and so was her face, in which rolled a pair of large black eyes as she nodded, too often, too rapidly, at what the man said. And her lips were thick, heavily painted, though innocent like a child's.

MAN: That's the one I like. That'll go with the dress admirably well.

GIRL: (*Nods, wide-eyed, emphatically*)

MR. PIERE: Sir. It's her first visit, isn't it? Sir, would you mind stepping over here? You see, the ladies . . .

MAN AND GIRL: (*Get up, follow Mr. Pierre to a chair in the corner, round which Mr. Frederic and Mr. Robert hurriedly place a paravant*)

MAN: (*Seated again on the armrest of the girl's chair, dangling his legs, looking up to Mr. Pierre*) You see this dress? It's nothing like the one I bought her. I don't see how I ever bought it. The terms were easy, it's true, but it adds up to a year's salary. It looks as plain as this one here. But it's worked in various metals, precious metals, I assume, on a ground of crystal — and the effect of the colors. Her hair ought to be

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golden red, to go with it. That's easy, I guess, but there are those eyes. Can we get away from those cow-eyes? I mean they are very nice — but with that dress . . .

GIRL: (*Nods, wide-eyed*)

MR. PIERRE: We could take care of that without any trouble at all. Three shots and we kill off the source of pigmentation altogether and base the color scheme on albino. There are two slight inconveniences: myopia and conjunctivitis, but we can handle that with Mr. Pierre's liquid contact lenses containing special ever-bright eye lotion. Easy application. A whole month's supply in this pocket-size easy-to-carry plastic bottle for only eight dollars.

MAN: Of course, those lips, without those eyes — they would seem like a blotch on the golden flow. They would ruin the neckline. They would block the contemplation of the whole . . .

MR. PIERRE: We can take off a good portion. But if you've come here to take my advice, I should say that your approach is somewhat mistaken. Beauty, you know, beauty you get not by making the lady conform to the dress you choose and cherish, but by choosing a dress to suit the beautiful lady you cherish.

GIRL: (*Rolls questioning cow-eyes from one to the other*)

MAN: The lady, she's my fiancee. She is young. Vera, darling, wouldn't you like to look like this girl in that dress?

GIRL: (*Nods, wide-eyed, emphatically*)

MR. PIERRE: To be beautiful, the lady must not look like any *other* lady. She must look like herself: her true self. We must discern her good features, underline them, develop them; we must suppress her not-so-good features, eliminate them. Elegance, you know, means choosing, reducing to the essential.

MAN: And who decides what is essential? Who knows her true self?

MR. PIERRE: (*Has passed a comb through her hair, then bobbed it up, holding her head, looking over her head into the mirror; scanning, with upturned eyes, his own solemn image, pleased*) I do. It's my job. My life-long experience with beautiful and not-so-beautiful ladies.

MAN: (*Doubtful*) And if your idea should not coincide with mine? The dress: you haven't seen it. Please keep in mind the color scheme, the neckline, the rhythm, the flow. Vera, darling, you want to, don't you?

GIRL: (*Nods, wide-eyed, emphatically*)

MR. PIERRE: (*Fixing his own eyes in the mirror, hypnotically*) By

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the time *I* get through with the lady, she'll be beautiful in *any* dress.

MAN: (*Yielding, with feeble voice*) Well, what do you suggest should be done?

MR. PIERRE: (*Still holding the girl's head, still gazing into his own eyes in the mirror*) First of all, the color of the face isn't right, and too much surface. Also, these bacon folds around the waistline. A bit dumpy, the whole little lady.

MAN: Diet? Massage?

MR. PIERRE: Goodness gracious! None of that any more.

MAN: What's wrong?

MR. PIERRE: In most cases it does not work. You know the ladies. The stealthy trips at night to the refrigerator . . .

MAN: I know plenty of cases where it worked beautifully.

MR. PIERRE: I guess you never looked into their faces, where desire, frustrated for months, where triumphing will power, hardness, self-directed and other-directed, leave marks of a most appalling unfemininity. Add to this the effect of heavy, compensatory smoking, and the fidgets. No, thank you, no more dieting ladies for me.

MAN: Well, what do you suggest?

MR. PIERRE: (*Taking his eyes off the mirror and suddenly fastening them on man*) Von Barbar mask and German bath. In two hours, it's all over.

MAN: (*Cowed*) If you say so . . . Anyway, some slimming . . . the dress. What else?

MR. PIERRE: The eyes should be brightened, but without bluing. The texture of the hair must be changed.

MAN: It's too woolly.

MR. PIERRE: And the hands. We'll look at them after the Von Barbar treatment. But my guess is they'll have to be changed altogether.

MAN: The hand-bank . . . that's a delicate matter. The sleeves of the dress . . .

MR. PIERRE: Leave that to me. I assure you I know what's best for her. I haven't gone wrong yet. You may call for her in three hours. Good-by, sir.

III

MRS. Firestone got under the drier. Her head, curled up and clip-spiked, in savage-warrior fashion, under the drier, her bare feet in a footbath, softening them up for the pedicure.

"Roast head and stewed feet today," she scintillated. And then, as the drier deafened her, "Honey," she screamed to the operator, "would you mind handing me my purse?"

"We can hear you, Mrs. Firestone," the operator said softly, her mouth close to the lady's ear. "You don't have to holler."

"This drier is awfully noisy,"

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Mrs. Firestone screamed. "I can't tell whether I am hollering or whispering."

"We do that on purpose," Mr. Pierre explained to the lady he was combing. "The noise, and the isolation it imposes, is good for the ladies' nerves, therefore for their beauty. It relaxes. Some told me they heard music in the din; others faint. Of course, if they scream through it like that, it serves no purpose. Your fingernails, Miss Dirtworth, would you like Nosegay or Psyche-pink?"

"Honey," Mrs. Firestone screamed, "I'm on fire. Would you mind turning this thing down some? A friend of mine, she gave herself a permanent, you know, and the drier was too hot and, guess what, her hair fell out just like that." Mrs. Firestone snapped her fingers. "The curlers dropped off, with the singed hair in it. Can you beat it? She coulda died."

Mr. Pierre walked over and pushed up the drier so Mrs. Firestone could hear.

"Please, Mrs. Firestone, don't talk so very loud. It's no good for you and it disturbs the other ladies."

Mrs. Firestone was pleased to be scolded by him. She encompassed him with melting, adoring eyes.

"By the way," he added, rewarding her, "I promised to let you see a Von Barbar mask. I am doing one now. Look over there and see how it works."

He walked back to Vera, where half a dozen operators were busy arranging all sorts of liquids and lotions and flames and syringes. They went silently and seriously about their business as though it were a ritual, like waiters getting ready for the crèpes Suzette.

Mr. Pierre pushed back his sleeves and announced for every one to hear.

"You see, this is how it works. If you put the Von Barbar preparation on a lady's skin — dried skin, spoiled unclean skin, old wrinkled skin, fatty tissue — it dies. It simply and quite painlessly dies off. This lady here, she's young; she does not need much. We can go two layers deep with one application; but some need more. Then we have to repeat the treatment after a couple of days, and you can see them in the meantime, our clients, on the street, even at parties, with inches of dead body around them. Men too, on sunny beaches, with mute mumbling dead lips. There's *nothing* to it. Most of them look just as dead before the treatment, which, if applied correctly, merely confirms an extant fact."

UNDER Mr. Pierre's careful supervision, the operators handled instruments, mixed crackling fuming liquids, blotted out expanding flames, fan-cooled the finished product, and applied it gently to Vera's face, neck, arms, legs, midriff, hips and belly. Flabby and yel-

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lowish, she turned flabbier and yellower yet.

"After that," Mr. Pierre went on explaining, "we take them into the German bath and the whole stuff comes off. Like the dry outer skins of an onion, till the fresh juicy core comes out. In two hours, a lady can get rid of twenty pounds of superfluous fat, of pimply skin and a threadbare scalp. She'll rise from the German bath slim, trim and prim, if somewhat shorter, and very young."

Several ladies, from under driers and over manicure tables, called out: "Yes, it's wonderful."

"You would think so," Mr. Pierre said, while massaging Vera's droopy cheeks with his thumbs, deadening them deeper, and gazing into his own eyes in the mirror. "You would think so. And I give them a pamphlet, a personalized pamphlet to each one, telling them how to stay the way they are and not to repeat the mistakes that made them the way they were. But you'd be amazed. As soon as they get out of here, they literally rush back into their former selves. It's shocking how they manage to get old and ugly in no time. And the nucleus thins out in the process. It is a strain, to decay in such a hurry — and you can't repeat the treatment more than two, three times; otherwise the German bath takes off all there was to a lady. Therefore I recommend it only for very special occasions: a late untoward debutante, a business woman who has been fired, a widow who has to make her life over — I mean unless it is a matter of an inch or two . . . How do you do, Mrs. Evergreen? Would you mind stepping over here? Be seated, please. Mr. Frederic will be right with you. You have your third shampoo today? Your expression has gained in profoundness. Didn't your husband tell you too? Well, happy trip."

"How do you manage to keep your gas bill down?" one lady howled from under the drier. "Watch out, honey," she added, turning to the manicurist, "and don't you snip off that finger."

"I use two burners instead of three," the lady under the next drier screamed back, "and don't do much baking."

"And you know, every time some one gasses himself in the kitchen, that shows on the bill, terribly. Ouch, honey, I told you. Now you *did* chop it off . . ."

AT that the door opened and the man came back. On his arms, before him, he carried the dress like a sleeping beauty. He walked on tiptoe, so as not to disturb. His cheeks were flushed, his chin white, his forehead studded with pearling sweat, his eyes glimmering, and every gesture racked with deep emotion. He walked straight up to the chair in which he had left the girl.

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Staring for a moment at her, then past her, he asked, "Where's Vera? Is she ready?"

Seven operators, busy in a half-circle over her prostrate body, lifted their curly heads. They looked like a great halo of angel faces around her resting on the ground of their mantles which merged into a single white surface before his glimmering eyes. They shrugged their shoulders. It looked like a wave, making a half circle.

"Mr. Pierre told you," the first one said.

"It would take about three hours," said the second.

"She is not ready yet," said the third.

"It will be another hour or so," said the fourth.

"Where is she?" he interrupted them, greatly alarmed.

They lowered their curly heads to form a crown of great sunflowers round her head. They felt sorry for him.

"Here she is," the fifth, sixth and seventh said softly, almost whispering.

It was a horrid sight. The Von Barbar mask must have reached its high point of efficacy, for Vera looked absolutely dead, an impression heightened by the ghastly pale green light flooding her from a reflector lamp posted at the foot-end. Her eyes, bleached to a watery tan and kept wide open by little pegs, stared glassily into the milky light. Her hair flowed from her like a piece of wet carpeting, a vicious dark copper-red, drops of which swam carelessly over her forehead and down the cheeks. Her arms were spread out and fastened in handcuffs to the armrest of the dentist chair. Back and armrests had been lowered to form a cross-shaped bed.

The sunflower crown unlocked and the black figure of Mr. Pierre inserted itself, leaning over her head. Below the deep deadness, a smile tried to stir, but did not quite reach the surface. The golden beam gathered from the diffusion of her ken, boring into his eyes with love, desire.

"How is the little lady doing?" he said with a tender smile.

Then he took a small trowel and stuck it into her side and turned it around. There was no blood.

"I think we are ready," he said, and his voice was pleased.

The man almost dropped the dress. "Ve- Ve- Ve- Ve-" he stammered, confused. Then he lifted the dress up high before him with both hands. It seemed strangely alive in the pale green light. He pulled it onto his breast, hugged it protectively, passionately, and, without saying another word, he rushed out.

WHEN Vera came out of the German bath, she looked slim, trim and prim. Mr. Pierre combed her hair, bobbed it up with a wavy motion of his hands and,

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looking over her head at his own image in the mirror, he said, "Are we pleased, little lady? Tomorrow we shall have our first lesson in individualized makeup. And tomorrow we shall learn a better posture, more correct carriage. And tomorrow we must not nod our little head so much any more. And tomorrow—"

Ladies came and ladies left and Vera waited. She saw shampoos and masks and baths, got used to them, and waited. She listened to much uncouth gossip between chair and chair: how much disaster and crime and betrayal and misfortune. And she waited.

THE beautiful receptionist in the blue suit with matching scarf said to her: "Well, well, how darling we look!" And then: "Honey, your skirt is too large for you now. You might just as well fix it – it will give you something to do."

Ultima rose from her dentist chair. They slipped off her gown, brushed her shining neck and shoulders. They slipped on her dress, handed her the purse, dusting, wiping, brushing, adding a last touch of perfection to their handiwork.

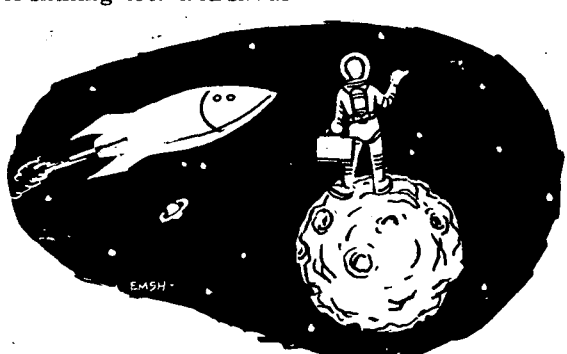
The lady in dusty-rose called on Vera and brought her a white gown. "Take off your clothes, honey, and put on this one. You can fix them better like that." And she fastened the gown adroitly with a suitable belt, a becoming pin.

The operators spread sawdust on the floor and began to sweep it. They sprayed the mirrors with windex, dusted the chairs, sterilized the combs, put away the curlers, hung the towels and locked the safe.

The beautiful lady in the white gown, with the pretty pin and matching bracelet and the cornflower in her barrette, walked up to Vera. They looked like sisters now, except that Vera was a shade lighter, newer.

"Honey," the lady said, and smiled gently her perfect smile, "honey, why don't you give us a hand while you are waiting?"

— ELIZABETH MANN BORGESE



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Way up yonder

A girl's hand was all he wanted of this plantation world—

I

THE thin little voice buzzed and sang: "Good morning, Sutherland Master! Good morning, Boss."

Berl Sutherland jumped with all his arms and legs at once, like a startled infant, and awoke.

He was in a canopied bed, in — yes, he remembered now — in the Old House of the Blick plantation. The maid was fussing around him.

"This is Persephone," cooed the maid's voice. "I am your personal servant, Sutherland Master. The Colonel wishes you good morning and hopes you enjoy your stay."

"Thanks," said Sutherland blurrily.

It was all beginning to come back to him — the long flight from Leesville, the arrival in the middle of the night, the sister of the girl he loved, who had made him welcome.

He watched the maid, bending over him, setting something down on the night table, touching the buttons that opened the shades and turned on the air vents and brought gently brisk music out of the speaker grille beside his bed. They

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By CHARLES SATTERFIELD

Illustrated by DILLON

and it cottoned to him no more than if he'd been a Yankee spy!

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certainly took care of their company on these plantations, he thought in sleepy admiration.

He sat up reluctantly.

"You wish to rise now, Sutherland Master?" The maid's voice came from under his pillow. That puzzled Sutherland for a moment; he had been on the planet less than twenty-four hours and its customs were still unfamiliar to him.

"Yeah, I wish to rise," he replied.

The maid said: "Your clothes are laid out. Call if you wish me, Sutherland Master. The name is Persephone."

"Thanks," said Sutherland, but only to air; the maid had buzzed through the room at high speed and was gone.

He shrugged and got out of bed.

IT was a nice room, too, he thought with a touch of worry. The bed had a handsome spread of gold brocade, now neatly folded down; the carpeting was thick, the furniture expensive. Thelma's family really had it.

What in all the worlds, he wondered, did she see in him? Sutherland wasn't used to underrating himself; he was aware that he was young, healthy, reasonably bright. But he was also aware that his draft number was up and that his total income for the year would hardly buy the contents of this one room, let alone the enormous rest of the plantation owned by Colonel Blick, Thelma's brother. Still . . .

Well, she had invited him here. Too bad she couldn't have been on hand when he arrived, but there it was.

Sutherland got up, staggered over to the window and, wincing, tried to draw the shades again. Sunlight was all right in its place, but what was coming in the window was a sallow orange color, and brighter than he liked even so. But there seemed to be no way for him to draw the shades. The maid had pushed a button, he remembered, but which one?

To Sutherland's groggy inspection, there seemed to be at least fifty — if all the round, square and toggle-shaped things on the control panel by the bed could be called buttons — and which of them might control the windows, he had no idea.

Nor, on second thought, did he want to tempt fate by experimenting. It was all getting very complicated, he thought worriedly. It hadn't seemed a bit complicated back on Earth, where one normal bright moon had filled one normal starlit sky, and one extremely normal girl named Thelma Coolidge Blick had been out on the balcony with him. But that was half a year ago, and a good many light-years away, and besides there hadn't been a war on then. Now he was on Lee, sixth planet of the larger component of Sirius, and Thelma was — where *was* Thelma?

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"Excuse me, sir," said a timid voice.

Sutherland jumped. In the doorway of the bath — *his* bath — stood a small dark man. And in his hand the man held, for the Lord's sake, a mint julep.

The man coughed apologetically. "I am Miguel Mookerjan, your neighbor. Pardon this intrusion."

"Good morning," growled Sutherland.

"Yes," said Mookerjan thoughtfully, "I suppose it is." He inspected the room, coming at last to the glass in his hand. "Oh, yes. Perhaps you would care for this? I am a Muslim," he said with pride, "and we are not allowed alcohol. But I do not wish to offend our host. So I came through the bath which we share to offer you, as you might perhaps say, a dividend."

Sutherland was puzzled, but he followed the direction of Mookerjan's eyes, and the answer to his puzzlement was on the table by his bed. A mint julep; the maid had brought him one of the confounded things too. Before breakfast!

"But you have not drunk your own," said Mookerjan with concern. "You are not of the Faith? Or perhaps A.A.? Or — oh, I see. I deduce, sir —"

"Berl Sutherland."

"I deduce, Mr. Sutherland, that you have never visited the colonel before?"

Sutherland shook his head.

"Ah, yes. I suppose," said Mookerjan thoughtfully, "that you are a business associate? A buyer of proto-spuds for one of the interplanetary exchanges? No? Then perhaps an attorney — I have heard that there are some estate matters to be settled. Or could you have known his father, the late Colonel Blick, or are you related in family? Or —"

"Mr. Mookerjan," said Sutherland dangerously, "I'll tell you my business here without your dredging for it. I'm engaged to be married to his sister."

"Oh, splendid!" cried Mookerjan. "A wonderful girl, Mr. Sutherland! I assure you, I have met many charming young ladies, but few compare with Robin Blick!"

"*Thelma* Blick, Mr. Mookerjan."

"That sister? But —" Mookerjan hesitated. "Well," he said, "I wish you every happiness. And now I imagine you wish to dress. You will not want to be late for breakfast. The colonel is *so* much more approachable then! *A bientot,* Mr. Sutherland, *a bientot!*"

THE Blick place was nothing special for the planets of the Sirian System. Sparsely populated, rich and fertile, the Sirian planets spawned countless thousands of aristocrats, so the colonel was by no means exceptional. But the total effect of the big house, seen by day, was enough to dwindle what re-

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mained of the morale of Berl Sutherland.

Discount the wide marble staircase that wound down from the sleeping floor to the great hall at the entrance. Don't consider the obvious wealth of the furnishings — tapestried walls and finely made furniture, all of them imported across light-years of space at a shipping cost Sutherland could not guess. These could be hand-me-downs; the antebellum South on Earth, centuries before, owned many such a plantation where the owners counted themselves lucky to see a hundred dollars in cash from one year to the next.

But there was much more — so much more. The food. The fine liquors. And, over and above everything else, the servants.

To Sutherland's bewildered eye, there seemed to be more servants than people in the room. All the same size, all the same shape, all stamped out of the same dies in the same factories. The plantations of Lee had their slaves, and the slaves were robots; they moved about the rooms of the Blick plantation house like busy beetles, cleaning, removing, serving and tending.

Degenerate, thought Sutherland angrily. You certainly wouldn't know there was a war on. Why must these people act like Confederate massas? A body servant for every guest and the most personal tasks done for you — it was revolting; it was nothing like the stripped-down, Spartan life he had been brought up to on Earth . . .

But it just might be, he thought, that if there had been an endless labor supply available on Earth, every human might have just such a home. Meanwhile, he was here. He would, he decided, attempt to enjoy it.

"Good morning," he said to the room at large, and let a small bronze-colored servant take him to a chair. Thelma was not in sight, he had noted at once, which freed him to observe the others who were.

The Blicks liked a house full. Lolling against the upholstered pillar of a round divan, Colonel Blick himself was reading the paper and answering absently the remarks of his guests. He had nodded to Sutherland, nothing more. Miguel Mookerjan glanced up, smiled emptily, and returned to his meal. The others gave Sutherland scarcely that much attention. All right, thought Sutherland belligerently, who the devil do you think you are?

But he remembered that his plan was to enjoy himself, and he gestured to the servants wheeling the little tables of food.

Neither of the Blick sisters was in the room. There were three young men, a matched set, wearing the same informal sort of uniform as Colonel Blick; like him, they

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were more interested in their newspapers than in human society. There were a couple of girls whose identity Sutherland couldn't guess, and a man in dark glasses on Sutherland's left, solemnly eating, like a stoker filling a furnace, without looking up.

And then Thelma floated into the room.

SUTHERLAND stood up hastily. "Darling!" she cried across sixty feet of wall-to-wall carpeting. "Dearest, I'm so glad you got here! I've been counting the minutes!"

Sutherland said awkwardly: "Hello, dear." Why, he thought, astonished, this is a *beautiful* girl. She was blonde, heavy-haired blonde, with two solid coils spiraling away from the nape of her neck; her eyes were bluest blue, her figure perfect.

"You know Robin," she said kindly, standing on tiptoe to be kissed.

There was another girl with her — the sister, the one who had let him in. Sutherland nodded.

"Poor angel," said Thelma softly, "I know what's bothering you. You wanted me to be here when you arrived."

"Not necessarily," said Sutherland quickly, "but — "

"But I couldn't. Of course I couldn't! Aren't you sweet to understand that? And I *would* have been there, dearest, if it hadn't been for that terrible party at the Grossfaders last night. And when Pat Grossfader brought me home and I heard that you'd arrived and gone to bed, why, I just wanted to *throw* myself into your arms. And I would have, too, if I hadn't been the te*eniest* bit high. Oh, those sloe gin daiquiris!"

"I hope you had a pleasant night's sleep," the mousy sister said more formally to Sutherland.

He nodded again. "Fine, thanks."

Across the room, Colonel Blick was reading something from the paper, laughing. Sutherland allowed the servants to help him to kippers, scrambled eggs, yogurt and a blend of eight kinds of fruit juices, sweetened with Antarean honey.

"Try the toast," Robin Blick said politely. "It's our own bread, baked from the proto-spuds we grow."

"I'm not very hungry," Sutherland apologized. He was craning his neck. Odd, but while the robots were serving him, Thelma seemed to have disappeared. "I wonder —"

Robin said: "She's probably in the butler's pantry. She'll be back."

Sutherland felt a faint chill. Around the room, the conversation flowed smoothly. Mr. Mookerjan was inquiring nervously about the animal origins of his fried scrapple. The three young army officers were chattering about the shootin' and fishin' on every landable planet in five solar systems. The girls —

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Thelma had brought them home from the party at the Grossfaders, it turned out — were perkily comparing hangovers.

"I think," said Sutherland apologetically, "that I'd like to talk to your brother."

"Sure," said Robin Blick. "Help yourself."

GETTING up, Sutherland made his way across the room. The colonel was deep in his newspaper, preening his beard. It was a hard beard to preen, being pale gold in color and the texture of the down on the back of a new-hatched chick. The colonel was nineteen years old.

"Oh, hello there," said the colonel, looking up for a moment, and: "Damn! Charles, did you see this in the paper? Grogan's going back to Mars."

"Mars!" cried the nearest of the young officers, dashed. "Good heavens! But he promised to come here!"

The other youths joined the chorus. Sutherland listened, puzzled. Whoever this Grogan was, he was somebody important. Perhaps a crop buyer, he thought; he knew that the big combines on Earth sent their representatives around. Or — well, it *could* be something more important, something to do with the war.

"I don't remember the name," he said politely. "Is Grogan a commission buyer?"

"Commission buyer . . . " The colonel put his paper down and looked at Sutherland more carefully. "My dear fellow, Grogan's a musician."

"A roar-and-shack soarer, friend," said Charles.

"Oh, that roar!" added the second of the other officers.

"And that shack!"

"Come along!" cried the colonel, jumping up. "You've got to hear his latest tape, Sutherland!"

And that was that, as far as talking to the boy about anything as important as his sister's hand was concerned; Sutherland couldn't get his attention that long.

He sat listening to the subtly buzzing drone of roar-and-shack music as long as he could take it, but that wasn't very long, and when he escaped and looked for Thelma, she was gone.

"Women's business," she had said, according to her sister Robin, but what the women's business was, Thelma had not said and Robin did not choose to tell.

Ho-hum, thought Sutherland, somewhat dampened, it isn't a bit the way it looked from that balcony on Earth.

II

THE man in the dark glasses said: "I suppose you'll be going in, eh? Good luck, Sutherland. I was in the last one."

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Sutherland was impressed. Overhead, the orange-tinted plastic dome let in enough of the light from blazing bright Sirius to bring the intensity to Earth standards, though the hues were all blue-white or dying under the unshielded ultra-violet.

Sutherland looked sidelong at the man in the dark glasses, his face sallow in the orange light, and said: "I guess it was pretty rough."

"Oh, rough enough," the man said modestly. His name was LaFargue and he was only five years or so older than Sutherland. He must have lied about his age, Sutherland thought abstractedly. "The worst thing is that you never see the enemy. Interstellar war isn't personal. It's chart your line of fire and pop your missiles off and wait. Well, it takes forty days to get to the nearest star even in sub-space, you know. But it takes four *years* for the light to come back, so you don't know what luck you're having."

"But then how do you know — "

"You don't know. You don't know a thing, not until the peace is declared and you can fly out there and look. We got two planets of the Antarean system, they tell me. I guess the light ought to be hitting Earth any day now. But I never went and looked. Didn't want to." He nodded politely and went back to the house.

Sutherland continued to stroll around the gardens. That was a good war, he thought, when we fought the Antareans. Six months of hard fighting and it was all over; they got Pluto and two of Jupiter's outer moons, but who cared about those? Only there was always the chance that a missile might hit a really important planet. Mars, say, with its fifty million souls. Venus, with its quarter-billion. Or — Earth.

He swallowed, thinking of what an interstellar missile might do to rabbit-warren Earth.

FOR that matter, war could well come to this planet — yes, to Lee, to the whole Sirian system. It was the technique of interstellar war to stand back and try to batter your enemy to pieces, but that technique was predicated on the sure assumption that your enemy would pulverize any fleet you might send against him.

That assumption held good for Antares, for Sol, for the present enemy system of Capella — but Sirius, after all, was a frontier system. There were a few space corvettes, a few emplacements on the smaller satellites, nothing that would give a flotilla of dreadnaughts any serious opposition. The Sirian system was fat and open to the war's dangers . . .

Assuming, of course, that the Sirian system was really *in* the war. Sutherland couldn't help feeling that war was strangely remote here. No one seemed to *care*.

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Still, the Sirian system was certainly important to the war — from Earth's point of view, anyhow.

Lee was only one of the three habitable planets, but it was a good one. It produced food enough for fifty times its own population, food that Earth could very well use.

The planet was near enough to its immense primary for the rays to be deadly to all who faced it without protection. That was why the plantation houses were shielded, why the crops were worked by robots. Humans wouldn't do. They would die.

Still, thought Sutherland remotely, *he* would rather have human beings around him than —

He jumped as a shadow crossed his face.

IT was one of the robots, holding something out to him. "Curse you," snapped Sutherland, "what do you mean sneaking up on me like that?" He was startled, and surprise brought on anger.

The servant, silent as a shadow, continued mutely to offer him the thing that was in its hands. Sutherland looked at it at last and recognized it: a small shoulder radio.

"Oh," said Sutherland ungraciously. "Thanks. I—" He stopped, remembering. He strapped the radio on and turned on the switch. "Thanks," he said again, knowing that this time the robot would hear.

"You are welcome, Sutherland Massa," said the robot's unhurried, uninflected voice. "Is there anything you wish?"

"No — " he looked at the robot's chest — "no, Persephone." Yes, that was the same one that had brought him his morning julep, his own personal attendant. The name was inscribed on its torso plates. "You can go," he said, and watched the little thing move silently away.

"Mr. Sutherland," said a girl's voice from behind him, "you really ought to keep your radio on. It's unsettling to the servants."

"Sorry." It was Thelma's mousy sister, Robin. "I try to remember," he said, with only part truth. The servants were robots, same as the field hands, and their voices were radio, not sound — as their "eyes" were radar instead of receptors for the visual spectrum of light. In order for them to hear or be heard, they needed radio equipment. That was the little box — the same little box he had slept with under his pillow.

"The gardens are lovely this morning," Robin Blick said flatly, nodding, and prepared to move away.

Sutherland was galvanized into action. "Oh, Miss Blick. I wonder if you can tell me where the colonel is."

The girl stopped and looked at him more thoughtfully.

"I want to — uh — see him," Sutherland explained.

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She nodded.

"I want to talk to him about — about something."

"Yes," she said, and smiled. Smiling, she wasn't mousy at all. "I thought you wanted to talk to him about something."

That was very pleasing, Sutherland decided; he couldn't help grinning. "Oh," he said, relaxing, "then Thelma's said something to you? Of course. Why shouldn't she? Sisters are always close, exchanging confidences and so on."

HE looked around the garden hastily. There, in a patch of portulaca, was a marble bench. "I tell you, Miss Blick — Robin. Won't you sit down for a minute? I've got a few things that are — well, worrying me."

"I bet you have," said Robin Blick. But she let him lead her to the bench.

She didn't look a bit like her sister — brown hair, brown eyes, a figure that was nice enough but hardly startling, and Thelma was definitely startling. But Robin seemed, thought Berl Sutherland, a friendly, sisterly sort of girl, who might be just the person to clear up the one or two little doubts that in the last twelve hours had percolated up to the surface of his mind.

"The thing," he said, "is that Thelma's such a high-spirited young creature. I wonder if she's *ready* for marriage. I thought I might have a chance to discuss it with your brother, but he seems rather—"

"My brother," said Robin Blick clearly, "is a flat-headed halfwit. He's only nineteen years old and maybe he'll smarten up — some. But he's got a long way to go."

"I see," said Sutherland after a second. "I only thought that — you know, head of the family, good manners, the right thing to do, all that sort of thing."

"I am sick to my stomach of that sort of thing, Mr. Sutherland," said Robin Blick in a pleasantly conversational tone. "I am sick to death of Lee and everything about it."

Sutherland cleared his throat. Things were getting out of hand; it was time to get the conversation back where he wanted it.

He said: "Tell me, what did Thelma say about me when she told you? I mean if it isn't a secret."

"It isn't a secret. She didn't say a word."

"But — "

"She didn't even say you were coming, young man."

Sutherland bristled. Young man, indeed! Surely the girl was younger than he!

"But I thought you said you had an idea what I wanted."

"Mr. Sutherland," said Robin Blick patiently, "I've been Thelma's sister for a long time now. You mustn't think you're the first young man who's come to talk to her brother."

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SUTHERLAND followed Robin Blick on a guided tour through the gardens, but it was wasted on him. His thoughts were of Thelma Blick and not of the place in which he found himself for the love of her.

But it was an interesting place, all the same.

The dome around the Blick manor house was a quarter of a mile across. Nearly thirty acres bloomed under its shallow orange roof. There was the house itself and its gardens. There were six acres of farm, for the beets and tomatoes and crisp green lettuce that did poorly in Sirius's direct light. There was an artificial pond, three acres of it, that stocked fine smallmouths and doubled as a reservoir in case of fire. There was a grove of fruit trees, and there were a dozen acres of pasture for the colonel's select herd of registered Black Angus.

Of course, that was only the domed portion of the estate. Outside the dome, naked under the blue violence of the primary, were over two hundred square miles. It was more than a plantation, more than a Texan's ranch; it was a principality.

This was the thing about Lee's perfect climate: no dust. There wasn't any, the result of high ionization from the rays of the primary; the dust clumped and agglutinated and fell. Well, there was a *little* — if there had been none, that would have been the end of farming, because it would have been the end of rain. Water vapor cannot coalesce readily without tiny dust granules for each droplet to form around. But because there was some dust, though not a great deal, the water vapor formed itself in large drops, fell and washed the air clean. Result: enough rain, and very small and few clouds between times. A perfect growing climate.

And the crops that were grown were something very special indeed. The name of the principal crop was proto-spuds. A miracle crop!

Wrench off the tops and you can cook yourself a superb mess of greens, rich in vitamins A, C, D and a dozen others. Dig the tuberous root and it is a treasure of assorted food. The peel, toasted, has a fine nutlike flavor. The starchy interior, dried and ground, makes a flour that bakes into delectable bread. Pulled young and green and cooked whole, the tubers resemble a super-Jerusalem artichoke.

If none of these makes a dish to your liking, let the whole thing go to flower and seed. Then the petals make a splendid jam, a first-rate source of all the B vitamins. The seeds, toasted, split into hulls and kernels. The hulls became a peppery spice, the seeds a richly perfumed sort of cinnamon.

It was a valued crop and — variously cooked, dried, radio-sterilized

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or frozen — it made a priceless export article for interstellar trade, and an essential part of production for war.

All of this Berl Sutherland listened to, or seemed to, but not much of it stayed with him.

"There is one thing," he said at last, when Robin Blick paused and looked at him and seemed to expect a question. "I mean there's something I'd like to know. Wasn't — wasn't Thelma *sincere* back on Earth?"

"You'll have to ask her yourself," said Robin, sighing, because he was a very nice boy, good-looking and smart and with just the right degree of shyness, and she didn't like what lay ahead for him.

III

IT was time for the ten o'clock news. Sutherland fumblingly tried to turn the set on, but a servant shot past him and expertly dialed. In the gun room down the hall, roar-and-shack music whined and thumped.

Sutherland said "Thanks," remembered that once again he'd forgotten to turn his radio on, and decided that he didn't care.

Mr. Mookerjan drifted over and joined him. "The war, eh? Good. Let's see how long we have to dance in the citadel while the Red Death roams outside."

Sutherland glanced at him quickly, but Mookerjan's pale-olive face was pleasantly blank.

The program was in stereo color and the timing was perfect; the animated commercial was just ending and the news commentator appeared, picking up his wand and pointing to a wall map.

A fleet action had been fought off Way Rock — though why anyone should fight for a Moon-sized hunk of frozen slag a light-year and a half from any warming star was more than Sutherland could imagine. There was, of course, no victory; the ships had shot at each other for a while, then lost contact in hyperspace evasive action. More than eight hundred planet-smashers had been launched at the enemy in the previous twenty-four hours. It was expected that the first enemy missiles would start exploding at various points in the Sol system within two weeks.

The commentator at that point disappeared, though his voice remained, as the vision tank filled with a perspective star map, all the stellar bodies bright dots of light in flashing color.

Colonel Blick bawled from the gun room: "What's all the racket in there? We can't hear ourselves think!"

Self-consciously, Berl Sutherland switched off the set. Colonel Blick appeared, tugging fretfully at his soft pale beard.

"Sorry," he grumbled, "but *real-*

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ly! That's Grogan's latest we were playing and you know how distracting it is to hear a lot of jibber-jabber when he's roaring."

"Of course," said Sutherland. He wasn't a roar-and-shacker, but he knew that the idea was that the music itself was supposed to be formless, empty; it was the listener himself who filled in the meaning.

"Kept thinking it was a damn John Philip Sousa March," complained the colonel. "Fine thing! Confounded war makes enough trouble. I don't want it busting into my music!"

"I'm sorry," said Sutherland. This was, after all, Thelma's brother and the head of the family. "The set's off. You can go ahead with your tape if you want to."

The colonel threw himself into a chair, breathing hard. "Later," he said. "Oh, that roar! You have to come and hear it for yourself, Sutherland. But let me get my breath first. Grogan takes a lot out of you, you know. There's plenty of them that can put out a dull beat, but for real *emptiness* there's nobody like Grogan."

SUTHERLAND looked quickly around the room, remembering.

It was the first chance he'd had to talk to the colonel, but it was a fine chance; Blick was sitting there and no one else was talking. Mookerjan had picked up a magazine, and apart from him there seemed no possibility of interruption.

Sutherland cleared his throat.

"Sir," he began, choked on it — the colonel was only nineteen years old, after all! "Colonel, that is, I've been wanting a word with you."

"Shoot, man. Roar away."

"Back on Earth," Sutherland said rapidly, "I knew your sister in school. Well, we were drawn to each other. She's a wonderful girl, Colonel Blick, and—"

"Say," said Blick, sitting up, "where *is* Thelma? You know, Mookerjan?"

The olive-colored man looked up from his magazine long enough to shake his head.

"Robin!" Across the room, the elder sister turned around. "You seen Thelma?"

"She isn't back yet," Robin Blick called.

"Damn it all," complained the colonel, sinking back, "I wish she'd stay around the house long enough to tell me what to do about Pat Grossfader. You're a friend of hers, Mr. Sutherland — maybe you can talk to her. Here she's supposed to marry Pat next month, and she's out alley-catting with every man under the age of ninety on Lee. Pat's not going to let her get away with that forever, Sutherland."

"*Supposed,*" repeated Sutherland carefully, the words chipping out of his mouth like bits of ice, "supposed to — to *marry* — *?*"

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"He's put up with plenty from her already," growled the colonel, tugging fretfully at his beard. "I wouldn't blame him if he called the whole thing off! That Mancini boy. That wasn't bad enough. Or the time she and George Henry Twyfort ran out of rocket fuel and stayed in orbit all night."

Sutherland said, with an expensive effort to make it sound calm and clear: "You say Thelma's going to ma— to ma—"

"And the trouble is, Sutherland, it's *important*. Pat's land is right next to ours. We have to think about the next generation."

"Sure you do," said Sutherland at once, without the faintest idea what he was agreeing to. His mind was suddenly stopped dead in its tracks; it refused to move past the word "marry."

"I suppose," said the colonel reflectively, "that Pat wouldn't kick up too much of a fuss about Twyfort if it wasn't that the boy thinks Thelma's going to marry him. That'll shack you! Marry him, and he doesn't have a foot of land to call his own!"

"I think," Sutherland said carefully, "that I'll just take a little stroll around the grounds."

He got up and staggered off. The colonel stared after him, then shrugged.

"Nice fellow," he said to Miguel Mookerjan. "Wonder why Thelma invited him here."

IN a wing chair before the fire, Sutherland hardly heard the others come into the gun room, and they didn't notice him. That was fine — he had a good deal of fire-staring to do. *Married!*

Dimly, he heard the voice of the colonel, enthusiastically piping: "You'll like this, LaFargue. *Music to Feel By*. Oh, that Grogan!"

A click and a whir of reels, and a bagpipe drone snarled out from the multiphonic speakers spotted around the walls of the gun room. Curse their nonsense, Sutherland mumbled to himself; but it was easier to stay there and listen than to get up and move. And once he gave the music a chance to work on him, it had something.

Drone, drone; no, it wasn't like a bagpipe, or at least not like the skirling bagpipe melodies. It had only enough variation of pitch to suggest that it was music and not a distant fire siren. It made him think of something, Sutherland thought drowsily, of — of weddings? Yes. Certainly there was a touch of Mendelssohn right there—or something that might have suggested something that was Mendelssohn. Weddings, and bridesmaids in pink and yellow, and Thelma down the aisle, dewy and delightful, and himself in a starchy collar and striped pants—

He caught himself. But he began to see just what it was the fans liked about roar-and-shack.

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When the spinning tape-end had *flick-flick-flicked* itself to a stop, Sutherland was feeling relatively good. Well, that was what roar-and-shack was for, too. It brought what was inside you out to the surface, where you could get at it and handle it.

He listened, hardly thinking of Thelma at all, to Colonel Blick's breathless: "Roar, man, roar! Oh, what a lip that Grogan has!"

"Very nice," said LaFargue's voice. "A touch classical, wouldn't you say? Beethoven's Sixth—green fields and a gathering storm, all that sort of thing. And—" the voice became measurably brisker — "that's what I want to talk to you about, Blick."

"Eh?"

"There's a storm gathering. Don't you know you're right in the middle of it?"

"Oh, Sam," protested the colonel's voice with faint indignation. "Did you come here to nag me about that shortage again? I know there's a war on."

"You don't act it," said LaFargue in a cold, scolding tone. "You plantation colonels act as though the Universe was staked down to bedrock. Nothing's going to change, is that it? The way Daddy did things is fine, because everything's always going to be the same as it was in Daddy's day."

Colonel Blick sighed wistfully. "I've got a couple other Grogans here," he offered, but not as though he thought LaFargue would take him up on it.

"No! Why can't you get the crops out?"

Silence, except for the colonel's sad breathing.

"I'll tell you why," said LaFargue. "There isn't a plantation on Lee that's met its quota for three months. Crops rot in the fields. Spuds spoil in storage. The robots aren't doing the job, Blick. It's up to you plantation colonels to get out there and straighten them out."

"Mr. LaFargue!"

"Or would you rather," LaFargue inquired, "let the Capellans march in and do it for you? Because if Lee doesn't meet its quotas, Earth isn't going to be able to eat, let alone feed its fighting men."

"Oh, damn it," cried the colonel, "it isn't only *us*, you know."

"I know. That's the bad part. Pershing's iron mines report one breakdown after another. In the Aldebaranian system, all the remote-operated planets are getting out of hand. I don't know, Blick, maybe we're getting too soft; maybe we've given the robots more than they can handle. But it's up to us humans to step in and set things straight. I'm telling you this for your own good. If you colonels don't do it voluntarily, the government's going to have to step in."

Colonel Blick said frostily: "Thank you for your comments,

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Mr. LaFargue. Is there anything else? No? Then, with your permission, I'll return to my other guests."

ROBIN Blick looked in the gun room and said: "Oh, there you are. We've been looking for you."

Sutherland leaned forward, recovered himself, blinked and set down the glass. "We?"

"The servants helped me," Robin said impatiently, taking in the glass and the low-water mark on the brandy decanter. "You can go now," she said into the microphone on her shoulder set. "Mr. Sutherland's here."

There were half a dozen robots with her, Sutherland saw blurrily. Confounded things, he thought, he wished they looked more like *people*. Or less. They were all of a pattern; only the coloring of the enamel on their faces and torsoes distinguished them — that and the name that was neatly lettered across each chest. There was a purple-and-white-checked Vespasian and a blue-polka-dot Theseus, a Ganymede in shades of brown and tan, an Echo in green.

"I thought," said Robin, distracting him from the retreating robots, "that you'd like to know that Thelma's back."

"Oh, fine," said Sutherland, frowning.

"My *sister*."

"Oh, *that* Thelma," said Sutherland agreeably, and stood up. "Well. Let's go see that Thelma," he said, taking her arm.

For some reason, this mousy girl named Robin seemed to be impatient with him, Sutherland noticed. That was most annoying of her. If she couldn't be a lady and polite to her guests, then what the devil kind of family was this anyway? A music-mad teen-ager posing as the head of the household, a rude old maid of every bit of twenty-three bossing the company around, and a faithless, heartless—

"Are you all right, Mr. Sutherland?"

"Fine," he said emptily.

"I thought I heard you grunt or something."

"I'm fine," he insisted. "That's what I said, isn't it? Now where's Thelma?"

They were back in the great manorial hall and the colonel was holding forth. Not on Grogan and his meltingly empty horn this time, but on Lee and its place in the war effort.

"The mother planet," he was saying pontifically, "has nothing to fear. We'll do our part! No Earthman will go hungry in this war."

LaFargue, keeping an obviously tight rein on his tongue, said briefly: "And if the Capellans occupy you?"

"Occupy?" repeated the colonel, stupified and staring. "*Occupy* us? The *Capellans?*" And he burst out laughing. "Oh, very amusing, La-

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Fargue. What do you think of that, friends? *Lee occupied!"*

EVEN Mr. Mookerjan giggled shrilly. LaFargue said doggedly: "It's not impossible."

Somebody spoke Sutherland's name, but he wasn't interested. He'd heard the same talk, between the same two men, an hour earlier, and wasn't interested in the recap. What he was interested in was Thelma.

He said: "Where is she? Thelma, I mean."

Everyone turned and looked at him. Mr. Mookerjan giggled again. "Why, I saw her out on the terrace with—"

"She *stepped out,"* said Robin, hard and fast, catching an expression on her brother's face. "She'll be back, Mr. Sutherland, so why don't you sit down and have a drink?"

Sutherland blinked. "Terrace, eh? Well," he said raising his voice, "I just feel the need of a little fresh air myself, and what do you think of that?"

The nerve, he told himself aggrievedly, of these frontier-planet civilians, trying to pull the wool over his eyes. Yes, civilians! "Colonel" was only a courtesy title that went along with inheriting the plantation. What did young Blick or his pasty-faced friends know about war? From his towering seniority as an almost-sworn-in, soon-to-be-inducted draftee, Sutherland looked down on them with irritation and contempt, and he marched across the room and out the French windows.

"Thelma!" he shouted.

The terrace was empty. Not even their intelligence was any good, he told himself, grieving.

"Thelma!" he cried again, and walked out into the gardens.

"Thelma!" he roared, and circled the little pond, and then he saw her. Or them.

"Oh, you rat!" said Sutherland, and hurled himself at the man with his arms around the woman Sutherland loved. "I don't care how much money you've got, Pat Grossfader — Thelma loves me and she isn't going to marry you!"

"Wait, buddy!" The man dodged away from the flailing fists. "Hey! You got the wrong man! I'm Charley Pough, from Cornell! I never saw Miss Blick before tonight!"

Sutherland said: "You cad!" He looked at the smeared lipstick and the disarrayed hair of Thelma Blick. "Hussy!" he cried. "Faithless woman! You aren't even true to Pat Grossfader, let alone me!"

And he wandered off into the night.

IV

OVERHEAD, the unfamiliar constellations twinkled, dim and orange-hued through the

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canopy. It was full dark. The evening rain had already come and gone; now the fertile ground would steep in moisture until the morning, when bright Sirius would pour its heat and light into the making of another five inches of stalk, another quarter-inch of girth of tuber, of each plant on the Blick place.

Sutherland wandered until something moved in the shadows in front of him.

He jumped. "Who's there?"

No answer.

"Speak up!" he barked, and then he remembered what he was always forgetting, and touched the switch of the speaker at his shoulder.

"Who's there?" he demanded again, and now the radio received and relayed his voice.

"Apollonius, please, Sutherland Master," whispered the speaker on his shoulder softly, and a green-and-white-striped robot stood before him, scanning him with its great silver radar eyes. "Are you lost, Sutherland Master?"

"Lost and damned forever," groaned Sutherland.

"Do you want Apollonius to take you to the house?" whispered the radio voice, soft and sexless.

"No, damn you." Ugly wretched little thing. "Get out of here. Leave me alone!"

"Yes, Sutherland Master." The four-foot mannikin obediently wheeled and disappeared.

Good, thought Sutherland sourly, glowering after it in the dark — can't stand the things.

Still, he thought, he might as well go back to the house. Faithless woman! But he couldn't stand out here all night. No, back to the house and up to his room. There was a lock on the door; he would use it. Speak to no one. Ignore the whole confounded mass of them. Then up early the next morning, get one of the servants to drive him to town, catch a plane to the spaceport and—

Say, he thought drearily, staring around at the trees, just where *was* the house?

HE called uncomfortably: "Hey, Apollonius, or whatever your name is!"

There wasn't any answer.

"Oh, damn," said Sutherland, irritated, and snapped the switch off. Never mind the robots; they were as obnoxious as their owners. It was impossible to be lost, he reassured himself—that is, *really* lost. True, he didn't know where he was, but that was only a detail. All he had to do was to go in one direction and keep right on going. Any direction — the way out of a wood is straight ahead, and once he was outside, he'd see the house or the dome, and either would orient him.

The robot had gone *that* way. Well, it was as good a way as any. Sutherland trudged after.

In a moment, he saw where the

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robot had been heading, and it wasn't toward the house at all. It was an entrance to the servants' quarters underground. It wasn't lighted and there was no one in sight, but it was perfectly clear in the dim orangy glow from the overhead stars.

Sutherland hesitated. "Apollonius," he called weakly, but there wasn't any answer.

Undoubtedly, he thought, the tunnel through the servants' quarters was the quickest way back to the house.

THE tunnel was dark — more than dark; it was absolute blackness. He could form no idea of its height or length. He hesitated for a while, the drink receding inside him, wondering whether, after all, it was such a good idea to entrust himself to an unknown pit whose only inhabitants would be hateful animalcules.

But the drink was not all gone. And Sutherland didn't care. If Thelma was lost to him, what had life to offer?

Resting one hand against a wall, he carefully advanced. In a dozen paces, he was completely blind, but he remembered his cigarette lighter; flicked it on, found the tunnel was perfectly plain and empty; flicked it off and marched confidently ahead.

Strange sounds stopped him.

Funny, thought Sutherland, was it an army marching at route step or a dance troupe? More than either of those, it was like the irregular crash of raindrops on the sodden fabric of a tent, a sound without timbre, only a multiplied *pat-a-pat-a-pat.* He moved a few yards farther until the noises were close at hand; then flicked on the lighter once more.

In the tiny flare, he saw a serpentine circle of shining bodies. Robots — the house and garden robots, and they were — why, dancing!

Dancing!

They circled about a chamber of the underground quarters and processing works, circled, spun, slipped and slithered in and out of a queerly limited pattern, like cod flopping about in a fisherman's basket. Their silvery radar orbs rolled endlessly. Their linked metal limbs waved and clutched.

Dancing, thought Sutherland, dazed — no one told me robots danced.

It could have been the rain dance of chrome-plated Indian children. It could have been the sacrificial rites of some island cannibals. But it lacked one human attribute that made it very strange indeed.

It was silent.

No music; none at all. There wasn't the thumping of a gasoline-tin drum, or the shrill of a reed fife; there wasn't any sound of breath or chanting. These were robots, not men. And if they danced to music,

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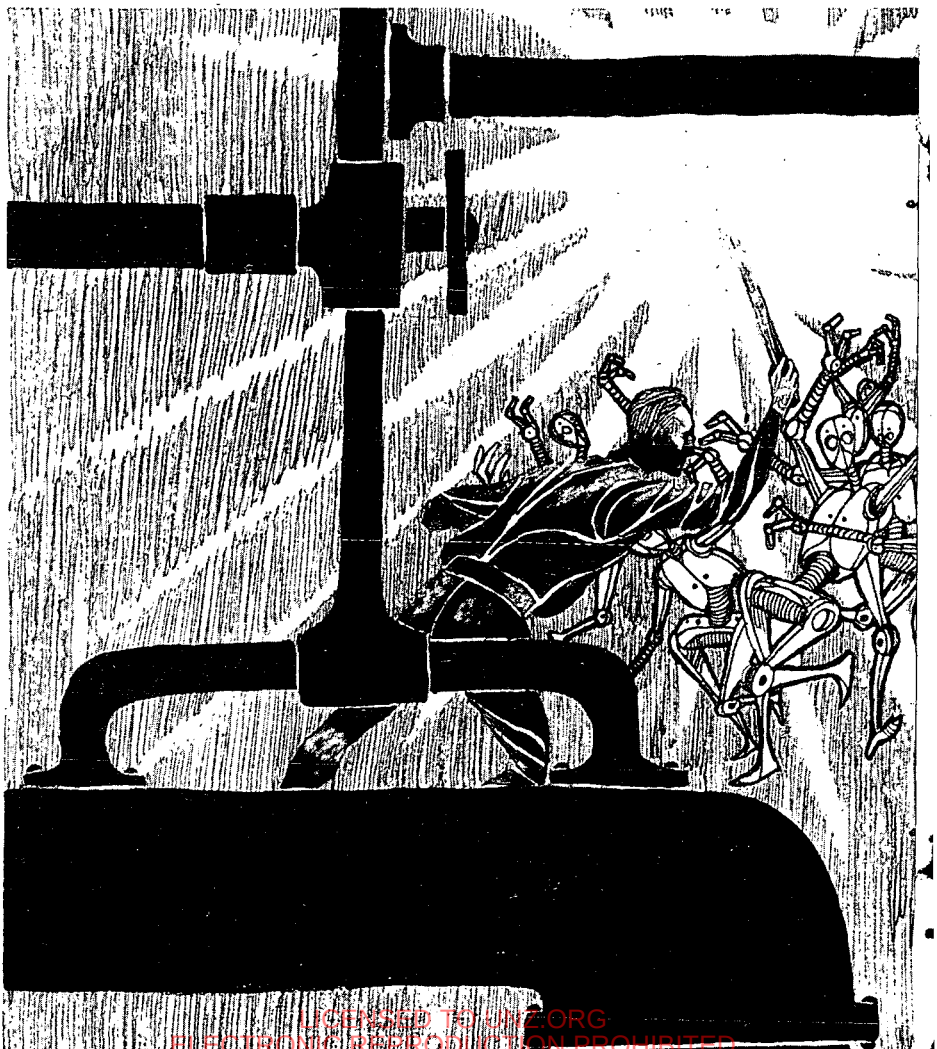
it was to a tune Sutherland could not hear.

Could not hear?

"Oh, curse the thing," he growled aloud, and snapped on the shoulder radio.

Immediately a clashing squeal of static beat at his ear. Music, yes — the robots were dancing to radio frequencies, inaudible to human ears.

They were in the processing chambers under the ground, Sutherland realized, the places where the proto-spuds were cooked, shredded, worked and packed.



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He let the little flare go out, but there was some light, he found — not much, but enough to pick out highlights on the metallic figures, and presently there was more — all he needed.

The light came from the processing machinery.

ROBOTS needed no light to work by, not while their radar eyes bounced echoes off masses; but the machinery had not been built with robots in mind but with men. It was part of their design that the lights of their gauges and meters should tell human eyes the temperatures and pressures and R.P.M. and voltages and other operating indicia of the machines, and faint as they were, those tiny instrument lights illuminated the scene. And the robots were starting the machines, one after another.

Purple lights raced across the face of a pressure cooker as a small brown-spotted robot moved a vernier with ritual precision. A panel of instrument dials on a freezer lighted up with blue and yellow and red sparks. A shredding machine groaned and chugged and began to spin, and over its blades a warning red glow gave notice that human fingers should not approach.

Sutherland stood staring, for there was something here that struck home.

The sounds in his radio — yes, they were clear enough; they came from the machines. The oscillating *squee* in his ear kept time to the movement of the chopper blades. A rhythmic *ping, ping, ping* matched the strokes of the compressor that fed ground stalks to the cooker.

In fifteen years or more, however long it had been since a hu-

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man being had troubled to enter the underground troll-world of the robots, the electrical machinery had worn. Once-firm contacts had corroded and warped. Each machine was now a potent generator of radio static — short-range, to be sure, because of grounding and the buried location of the plant — but loud enough close at hand for the robots to hear. And it was radio that the robots lived by.

Why, the sound of the grinder was a dance beat. What must the gamma-ray generators sound like! What tunes must come from the conveyor belts and the air compressors!

It was dance music, savage and primitive.

It was voodoo.

Staring, Sutherland thought of servile peoples and their customs. In all Earth's history, the slave population had always its religion and its ritual.

Why shouldn't robots have them as well?

There was only one answer to that question — it wasn't a question; it was a fact. The robots danced to the music they lived by, and though the steel and enamel faces showed no expression, there was emotion enough for a Haitian conjure ceremony in the stamp of metal feet and the frenzy of metal arms.

He turned blindly and fled down the dark tunnel, careless that he barked his shins and scraped his knuckles, and even out in the cool fruit grove with the orange-tinted stars above, he could feel something closing in on him more weighty and more frightening than the pressure of rock above the robot warren.

V

SUTHERLAND woke up, and clutched his head, and groaned. What a dream! All that brandy and the tumult of his emotions regarding Thelma Blick had combined to produce a hangover, a massive drunk, strange dreams . . .

Dreams?

He sat up suddenly. The maid robot was moving silently about the room. From under his pillow, the robot voice sang: "Good morning, Sutherland Master. Here is your julep."

Sutherland stared at her, trying to remember. Dreams? *Had* it been a dream, the weird robot witch-dance in the tunnel?

No, he was sure. It was no dream; Persephone was one of the capering corybants. Her colors, brown spots on a silvery field — he remembered them; the one that operated the pressure cooker, he thought, tapping switches, treading on valve-pedals, like a tympanist beating out hot riffs.

He stared at the robot, but what was there to say? He ignored the julep and sat up.

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Quickly the robot was beside him, helping him into his robe, adjusting the little shoulder-radio, knotting his sash.

"Get lost," he growled.

The expressionless face hesitated; then Persephone went about her dusting-tidying duties. You could almost see the electrons cascading around the digital robot mind: *Get lost? A figure of human speech. Not to be taken literally. Means: "Do not disturb at this time."*

Sutherland dragged himself to the bath.

Behind the closed door, he switched on the shower and watched it cycling — hot, cold, steaming, suds, rinse — inside the stall. Steam billowed around him.

"Oh, damn," he groaned. Why must life be so complicated? The girl he loved — faithless. The war that was about to consume him — treated here as though it did not exist — in spite of the manifest importance of Lee and its produce to Earth's war effort. His host a roar-and-shack devotee.

Everything was all messed up.

"Oh, damn," he growled again, staring at his face in the shaving mirror.

It was a perfectly decent face; why couldn't Thelma learn to like it? Nothing special, of course, he admitted, but —

"She's nuts," he grumbled testily. "Thelma *promised* to marry me. I'd give anything to make her do it. I—"

There was a light sharp tapping at the door, and a gentle murmur from the shoulder radio: "Sutherland Master?"

Startled, he opened the door. Persephone stood there, the blind silvery radar orbs scanning him emptily. He said irritably: "What the devil do you want?"

"Sutherland Master," purred the robot, "exactly what do you mean by 'anything'?"

HASTILY dressed, full of what he had to say, Sutherland hurried to the breakfast room with Persephone in tow.

LaFargue was silently seated near the door, a newspaper open in his lap. He looked up opaquely in his dark glasses as Sutherland came in, but said nothing. There was a commotion in the room; the colonel was pacing tautly about, grumbling, a fidget of nerves in flesh! "Oh, where is he? Do you think his copter could have crashed?"

"Please," murmured one of the other young officers, slopping his coffee as his hands shook, "don't be nervous. There couldn't have been an accident." He dropped his cup crashing to the floor.

"What's the matter?" demanded Sutherland.

The colonel stared at him. "Oh," he said, identifying this stranger. "You. Well, it's Grogan. He's com-

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ing here! Can you *believe* it?"

Sutherland said sharply: "That's fine, but there's something more important going on."

"*More* important than *Gro*—"

"Colonel," Sutherland interrupted, "I must ask that no one leave this room. Especially you, Mr. Mookerjan." The little man looked up with his bland face politely curious; he was sitting on a hassock by the window, quietly buttering toast. "I want you to listen to this, Colonel. Persephone, come here."

Obediently the maid robot came to him. The colonel fussed: "Not now, old chap. Please. Grogan's coming any minute, and — Oh, I can't bear it if something happened to him! He was all set to go back to Mars. If there's an accident coming here, when he only came because I asked him, I couldn't *bear* it."

Sutherland said steadily: "This is more important than Grogan. I have reason to believe that your robots are conspiring against you."

The colonel whispered: "My word. What an idea!" He glanced at his friends, shaking his head.

"It's a fact, Colonel."

Sutherland observed that, on the hassock by the window, Miguel Mookerjan's face was turned away. The butter knife was rigidly still in his hand. Thelma and Robin seemed politely curious. LaFargue, his eyes invisible, had quietly come closer. All the others in the room clearly thought he was mad.

"Listen," said Sutherland. "Persephone! I have a problem. I love Thelma Blick, but she doesn't love me."

He turned up the volume on his shoulder radio, so that all might hear. The purring voice of the robot blasted in his ear: "OH, TOO BAD, SUTHERLAND MASTER," it roared sweetly. "MISS THELMA HAS OWN PLANS, WE PEOPLE EXPECT. MANY MASTERS ARE SAD BECAUSE MISS THELMA DOES NOT LOVE THEM."

"But isn't it true that many masters are happy, too?"

"CERTAINLY, SUTHERLAND MASTER," agreed the robot.

"And couldn't you people help me to make her love me?"

IT was out. Even after what the robot had told him in his own room, Sutherland winced to hear the words come from his own mouth. Help him! It was the maddest sort of request. It was like asking a vacuum cleaner to touch for King's Evil, or a dishwasher to mesmerize a headache away.

The sweetly sexless voice of the robot bargained: "YOU MUST GIVE US PEOPLE SOMETHING IF WE HELP YOU. MOOKERJAN MASTER ALWAYS DID."

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MISSING SOMETHING?

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"Thank you, Persephone," sighed Sutherland with relief, and clicked off his set.

He confronted the colonel. "Now what do you say, Blick? You see?"

"I—" faltered the boy, "I — I'm afraid I don't."

But if the colonel failed to understand Sutherland's meaning, there was someone in the room who did not.

Miguel Mookerjan stood up and his hand was in the pocket of his robe. He wasn't a tall man and he looked rather like a plump little dachshund pup, but he was no figure of fun as he advanced toward Sutherland.

"You should not have meddled," he said gently. "It was foolish."

"Don't try anything rash!" Sutherland warned sharply. But he wondered how he could back up the warning. If Mookerjan had a gun, it gave him a certain definite edge. Certainly Sutherland could count on no help from the colonel, who was in a paralysis of surprise. Only LaFargue could be hoped for at all, and LaFargue seemed content to stand quietly by and watch.

Mookerjan said softly: "I am never rash, Mr. Sutherland. It is not a characteristic of my family. Conservative, quick to learn, prolific, thrifty — those are the traits that have made my family great. We," he said proudly, "were one of the most numerous families in Granada, many centuries ago. Then we moved to Puerto Rico as Spain grew too crowded, from overcrowded Puerto Rico to New Delhi, from India to — —"

"To Capella?" ventured Sutherland.

Mookerjan looked at him thoughtfully. The accusation was plain. Sutherland was saying: *You're a spy.*

The little man smiled apologetically and nodded. "I rather thought you realized I was a Capellan," he said with a touch of sadness. "Knowing that, you must know why I am here. That is too bad. There are a hundred like me on Lee, commission brokers or wandering journalists or doctors, as the spirit moves us to pretend. It is not convenient for us that you should know we exist, although it can scarcely defeat our purpose."

"And exactly what is your purpose?" Sutherland demanded.

Mookerjan sighed. "That should be obvious," he said softly.

Sutherland spun and confronted Colonel Blick. "You see? Spies! Using your robots to work against your government! And not above using them, too, to help out with their own little romantic intrigues, I'll bet!" And he glanced at Thelma Blick, who seemed perfectly composed, thoughtful, disinterested — she was idly examining her nails — but who was blushing beet red.

Colonel Blick cast a glance at his watch, a glance at the door,

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frowned, and then obviously set his mind to the problem at hand.

"All right," he said irritably. "You've made your point, Sutherland. What about it?"

Sutherland blinked. *"What —"*

"Mr. Mookerjan is a spy, you say. Isn't that a matter for the Space Guard?"

"It's a matter for every decent citizen of Earth!" Sutherland blazed.

"Oh, of course," the colonel agreed. "But my planet is Lee, Mr. Sutherland. It isn't a state or a nation. It's a colony."

Sutherland stopped short, the breath gone out of him. Incredible!

"And besides," said the colonel, his voice suddenly joyful, "I hear — yes! I hear a copter, coming through the dome port!"

He went flying to the door and that was the end of that discussion. Grogan was here.

SUTHERLAND stood in a corner of the room, watching the triumphal entry of the hero. For a few minutes, he had been the center of attraction; now he was ignored in the wings. What had happened? He stared at the colonel with sick disbelief. How *could* the man be so thoughtless, heedless, careless — so *stupid?*

LaFargue whispered from behind him: "Too bad, Sutherland. You tried."

"Eh?" Sutherland turned and looked at him, but the eyes were invisible behind the glasses. "Yeah," he said, and looked again at Grogan, smiling and nodding, serene with the affable dignity of someone who knows he is the greatest man in the group.

"Play something, Grogan!" begged the colonel, beside himself with excitement. "Oh, roar, man!"

Robin Blick whispered: "You're perfectly right, you know."

Sutherland stared. She was there too, beside LaFargue. "Sure," he said.

Off by the window, Miguel Mookerjan had retired to his hassock and his cold toast, but his cold, bland eyes stayed on Sutherland. Sutherland sighed.

"Play," coaxed the colonel, and Grogan held up his hand, laughing. He was a big man, fair and fat, with short red hair and a plump red face.

"I didn't bring the pipe," he said, "but I tell you what I can do, pal. Want to hear my newest? I got the tape. Right here."

"Oh, splendid," moaned the colonel, half carried away with joy, and they hastened to set the tape machine up in the great hall.

"Sit down," LaFargue said softly. "Look." He was holding out something that glistened ruby — a red-plastic I.D. card, an officer of the Space Guard.

Sutherland's eyes opened wide.

Robin Blick glanced, and she was surprised too; but she said: "I

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should have known. But really, I don't know what you can do here, Mr. LaFargue."

LaFargue said harshly: "Nothing, probably. That's what I've been able to accomplish so far. Why should it change now? But I have to try. What about this robot voodoo, Sutherland?"

"Oh, I can tell you more than he can," sniffed the girl. "Silly nonsense. The people — the robots, that is — have their own secret rites. Well, it keeps them contented. I suppose it's like that in any slave society," she admitted, flushing. "That's what this is, after all. But you mustn't think too badly of us. Plantation masters are decorations, nothing more. We sit around and the men drink juleps and the girls enjoy all the flirtations they can. And if once in a while somebody uses a little robot voodoo as a sort of love potion, what's the harm in that?"

Sutherland asked: "But how—"

"Ssh." She waved to the knot around the tape player. "Don't distract my brother now. Let him get his tape going. In the past decades," she lectured, resuming, "the robots grew away from the humans. There was no common ground of culture or interest. The robots worked while we loafed, and naturally they developed their own little customs. Voodoo dances, charms, magic — harmless enough, of course. They wouldn't *hurt* anyone. How could they? Robots aren't designed to hurt humans."

"But the charms work!" Sutherland yelped.

Robin Blick looked surprised. "Of course."

Sutherland and LaFargue looked at each other.

Sutherland said urgently: "Robin this is important. Don't you see what's happening here? The whole Sirian system is falling down on the job. Maybe your robots have something to do with it. *How* do the charms work?"

"Why, sub-aural compulsion," said the girl, surprised. "Didn't you know?"

THE tuneless bagpipe drone of Grogan's latest wailed through the room. Sutherland started over to the knot around the tape machine, hesitated, looked at LaFargue.

"Go on!" LaFargue whispered hotly. "Do it now!"

Sutherland nodded and reluctantly started over. Well, he thought, what did he have to lose? Casually LaFargue got up and followed him.

"Say," said Sutherland enthusiastically, "that's what I call *roaring!*"

The colonel looked at him first limply, then irritably. "Quiet!"

"Sorry," murmured Sutherland, and worked his way closer to the machine.

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All around it the audience was sprawled, boneless and tranced, in chairs and sofas; they were really sent. In fact, Sutherland realized, it was getting him too. He was being lulled to relaxation and to dreams. He took a deep breath, glanced once at LaFargue, and kicked the tape player's plug out of its socket.

The Grogan roar blipped and died. The colonel twitched and sat up. *"What —"*

"Oh, sorry," apologized Sutherland. "Clumsy of me! But Mr. LaFargue here will fix it — won't you? He's an expert on — on electronic things."

The colonel gave him a look of intense pain. "Hurry it up, LaFargue," he grumbled.

"I can't wait to hear the rest of it," Sutherland chattered while LaFargue busied himself with the player. "He's great."

The colonel blinked. "Your taste does you credit," he said sourly. "Astonishing how it's improved."

"What? Oh. Yes," said Sutherland, trying not to seem too vitally interested in what LaFargue was doing.

All the thing really needed, of course, was to put the plug back in the socket, and if LaFargue took too long, it would be only a matter of time before the colonel or another of them took the task away from him. But LaFargue was thorough. He peered into the open back of the set, hesitated, moved a dial, peered again.

"Come on!" growled the colonel.

LaFargue stood up, thought for a second, and nodded.

"All right," he said. "Turn it on."

"The plug!" Sutherland whispered.

"Oh, of course." LaFargue bent and stuck it back in. As he came up, he said softly: "I cut out everything but the very highs and the very lows. Let's see what happens."

The tape began to mumble and squeak. LaFargue listened carefully for a second, then cried: "That's it! The high is just overtones — wait a second!" Quickly he turned the treble dial; the squeaking died. "But the low — here, let's have more volume."

He turned it up.

A dispassionate deep voice came compellingly from the speaker:

"Relax. Don't worry. Take things easy. The Capellans won't come here. If they do, so what? Earth is far away. Don't get involved. Relax. Don't worry —"

"And there," cried Sutherland triumphantly, "is what is buried under every Grogan tape! Subaural compulsion, a hypnotic message that lulls and weakens! Grogan! I arrest you in the name of the Space Guard, as a Capellan spy — and the same goes for you, Miguel Mookerjan!"

The rest was pandemonium.

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WELL, they arrested Grogan all right, and Mookerjan too; and after a few phone calls made by LaFargue, the word came that the Space Guard was on its way.

"Sorry," said LaFargue handsomely to Sutherland, "but really, *you* can't arrest them, you know. But I'll see that you get credit for it."

"I think I've got everything I want already," said Sutherland.

"Oh? Oh. I see," said LaFargue, and went to check on his prisoners.

The colonel and his cronies said: "Uh. Sutherland. We must seem — But you know how it is. We're sorry."

"Of course," said Sutherland, and bowed as they left.

Thelma Blick came flying. "You were *wonderful*," she cried, glowing. "Oh, darling, I'm so proud of you! And I'm sure you'll forgive silly old me for —"

"I forgive you, Thelma," said Sutherland. "Good-by, Thelma." And he held the door for her.

She looked at him with popping eyes, but there wasn't any choice. She went.

He turned to look at the mousy sister, who was not mousy at all, he had previously realized. She said tautly: "I thought you came here to get married."

"I did," said Sutherland, "and I shall."

And he took her by the arm and marched her out. And though she looked surprised, and acted surprised, the fact of the matter is that she wasn't surprised at all.

— CHARLES SATTERFIELD

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(Continued from page 8)

North Pole via submarine — this when the Navy only had one." *(Wasn't that author somebody who called himself Noname?)* "In over 70 years, I have come to believe almost anything is possible, because present-day commonplaces seemed like the wildest dreams of fantasy when I was young. But I do NOT like thinking, reasoning robots. No religious obection — just that the human brain is too complex for duplication in a robot's brain case." *(Maybe, maybe not, but if 70 years could turn the wildest fantasies into commonplaces, 70 or 700 or 7000 more could show much more certainly if it is or isn't. Industrial Research, 200 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago 4, Ill., covering research in 80 fields vividly and in depth, says: "Cryogenics may yield cells even* smaller *than the infinitesimal synapses of the living brain . . . For MIT scientists now are experimenting with cryotrons of the order of 500 angstroms wide (less than the visible wavelength of light). Thus, even if these future computer building blocks were packed 'loosely,' billions of them would fit into the 'infinite' space of a cubic centimeter. And a component only a few cc's wide could hold far more information units than the relatively immense human skull holds neurons. A cryotron-perceptron, in this sense, would be 'more than human.'" Anyone whose mind has remained young and open for so many years is truly admirable. Don't close it now, when research into the mechanics of intelligence is moving forward so speedily and rewardingly.)*

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— H. L. GOLD

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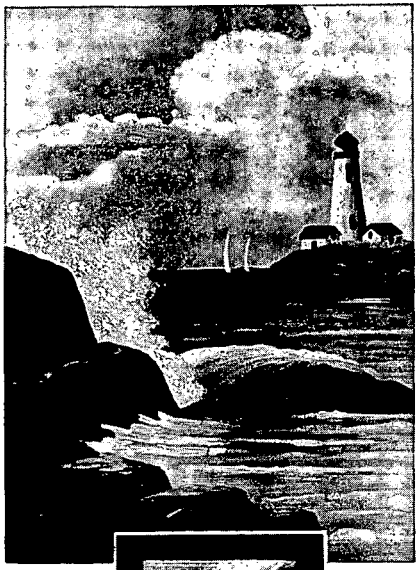

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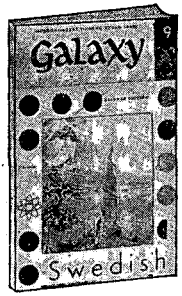

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